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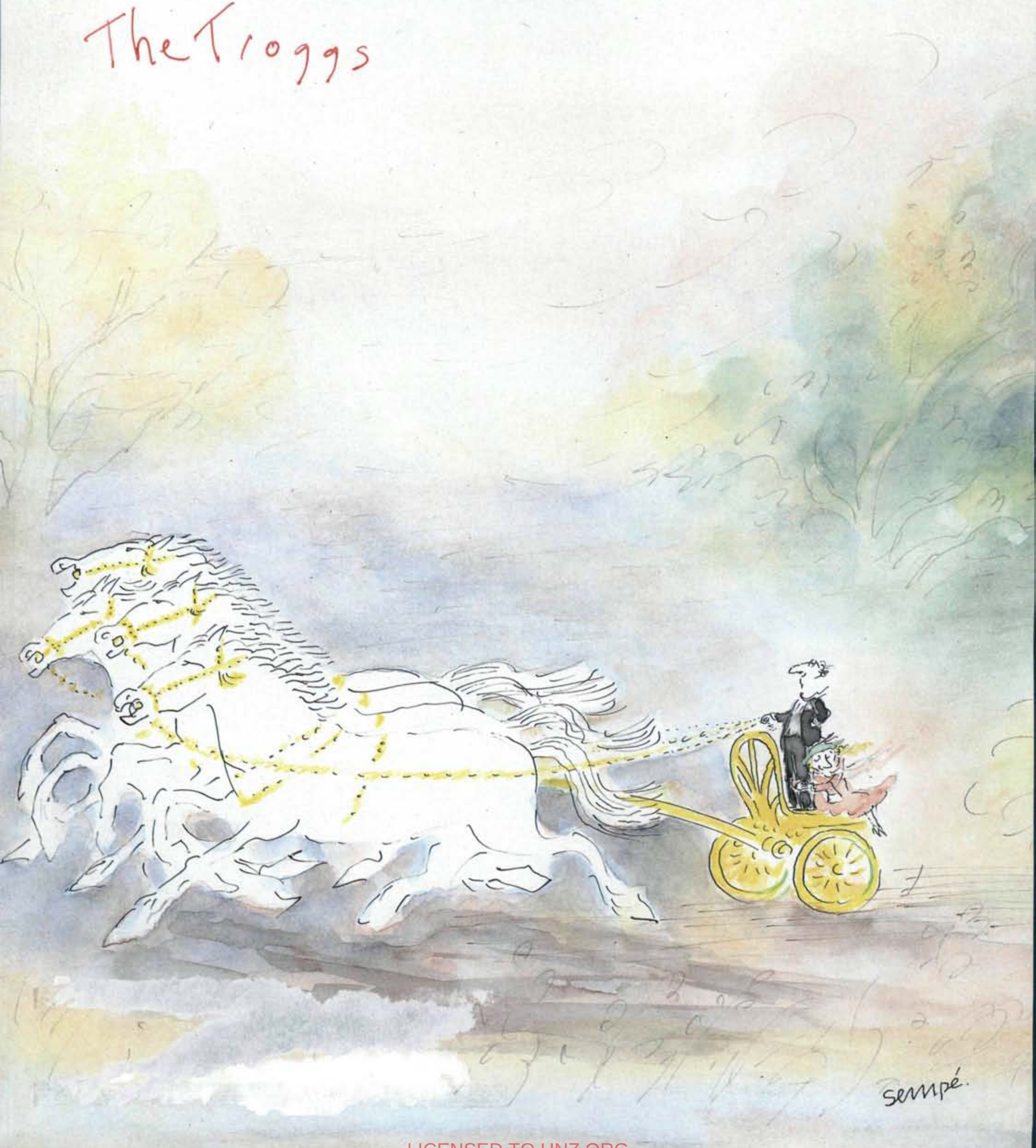

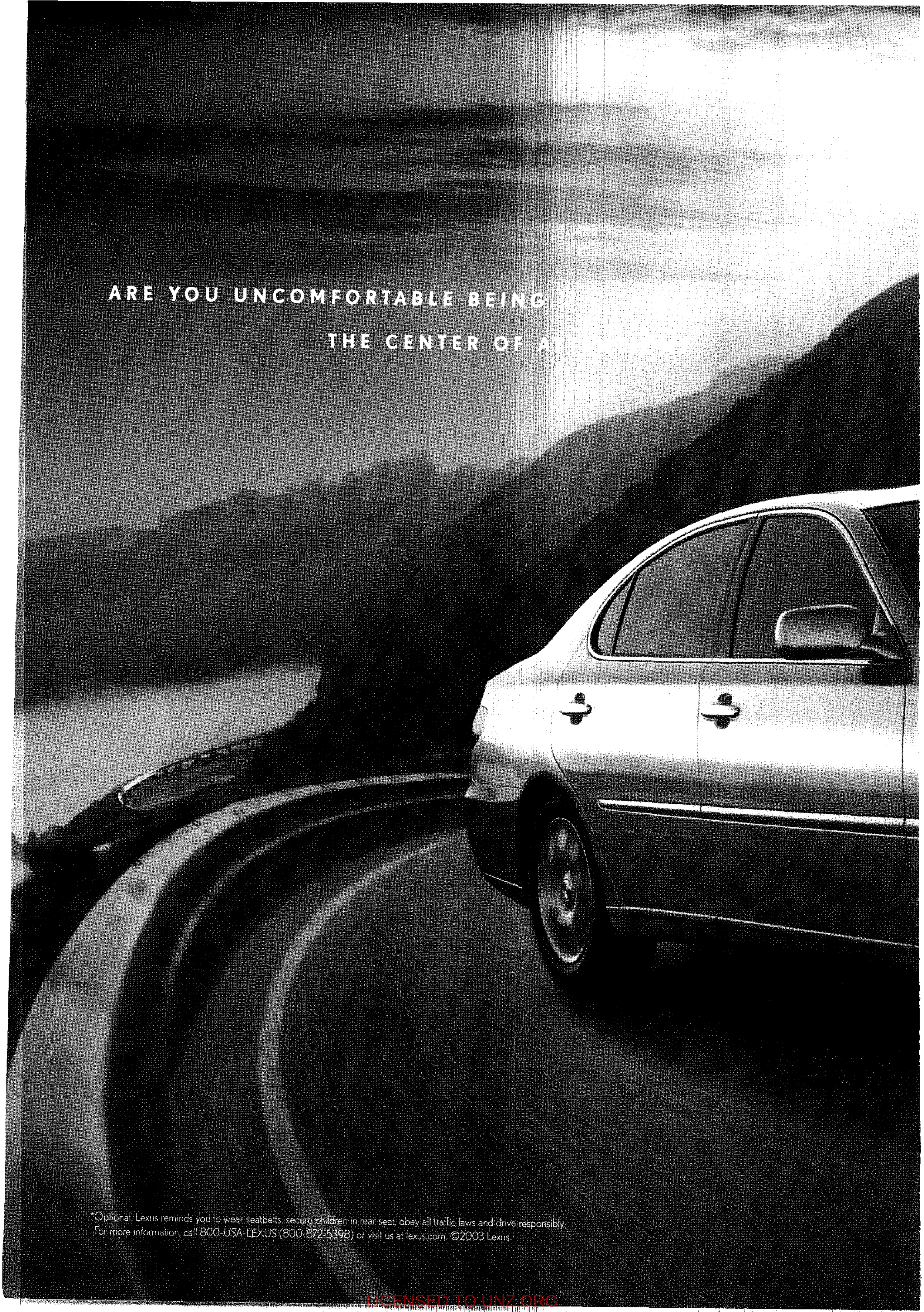
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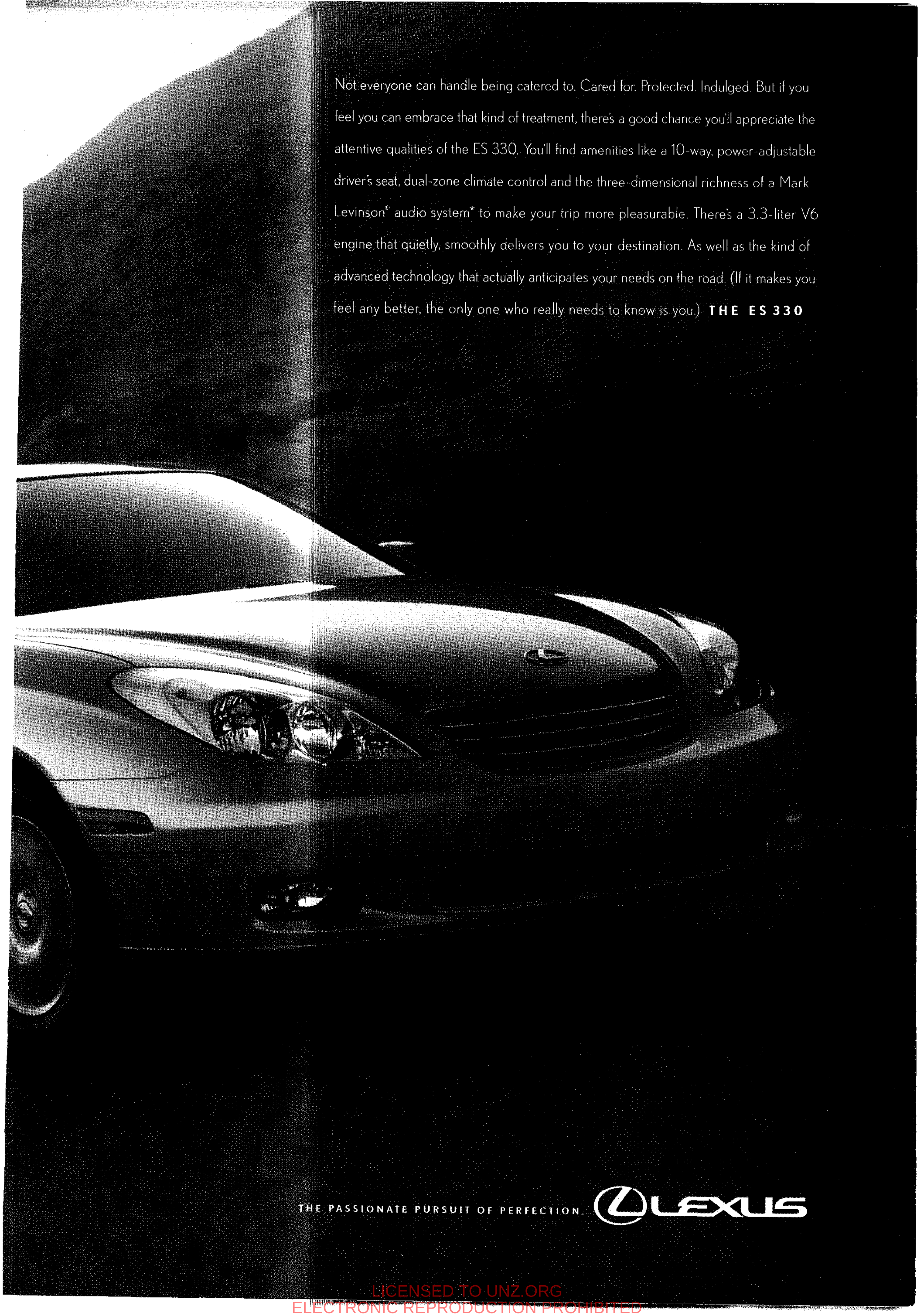

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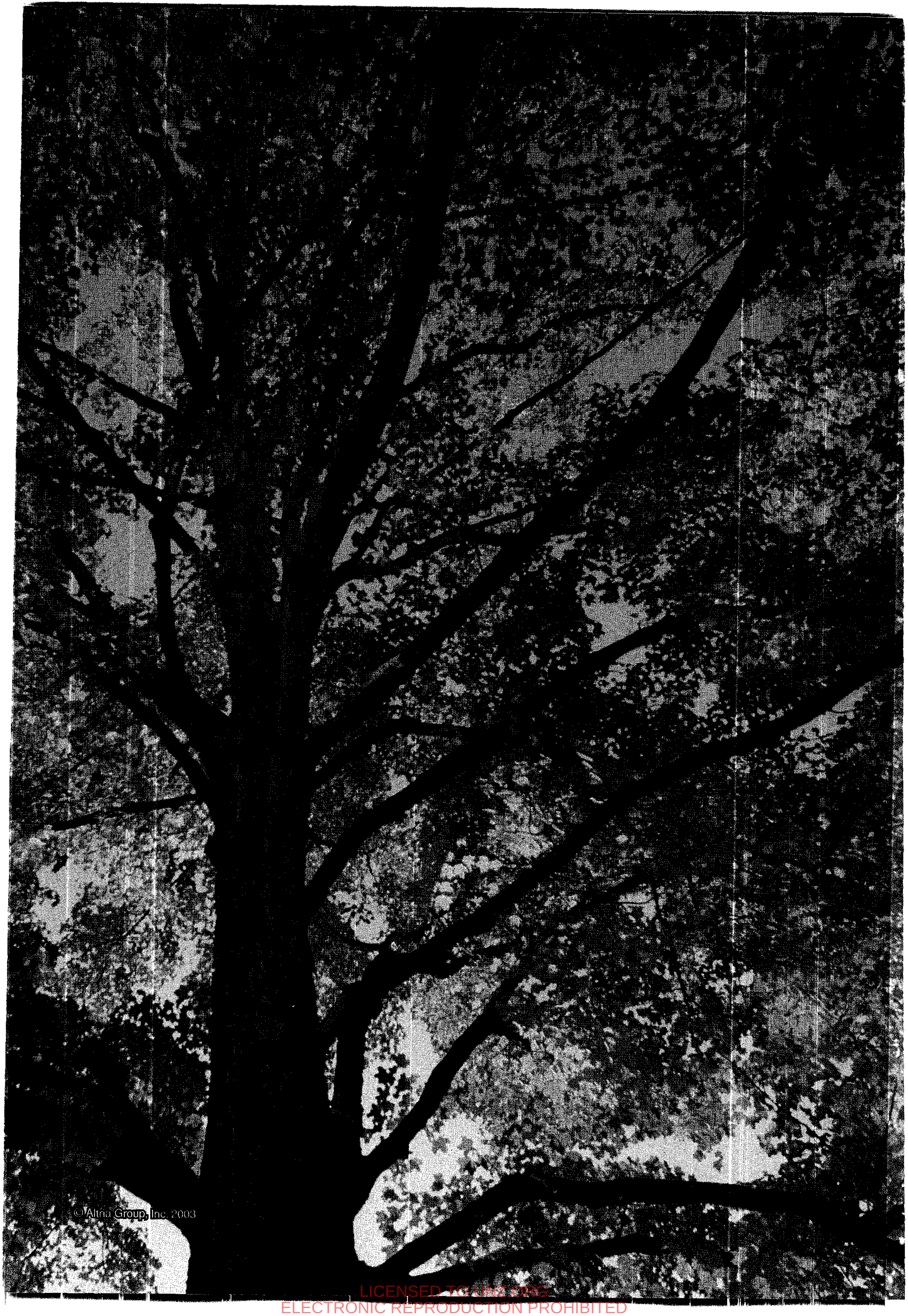

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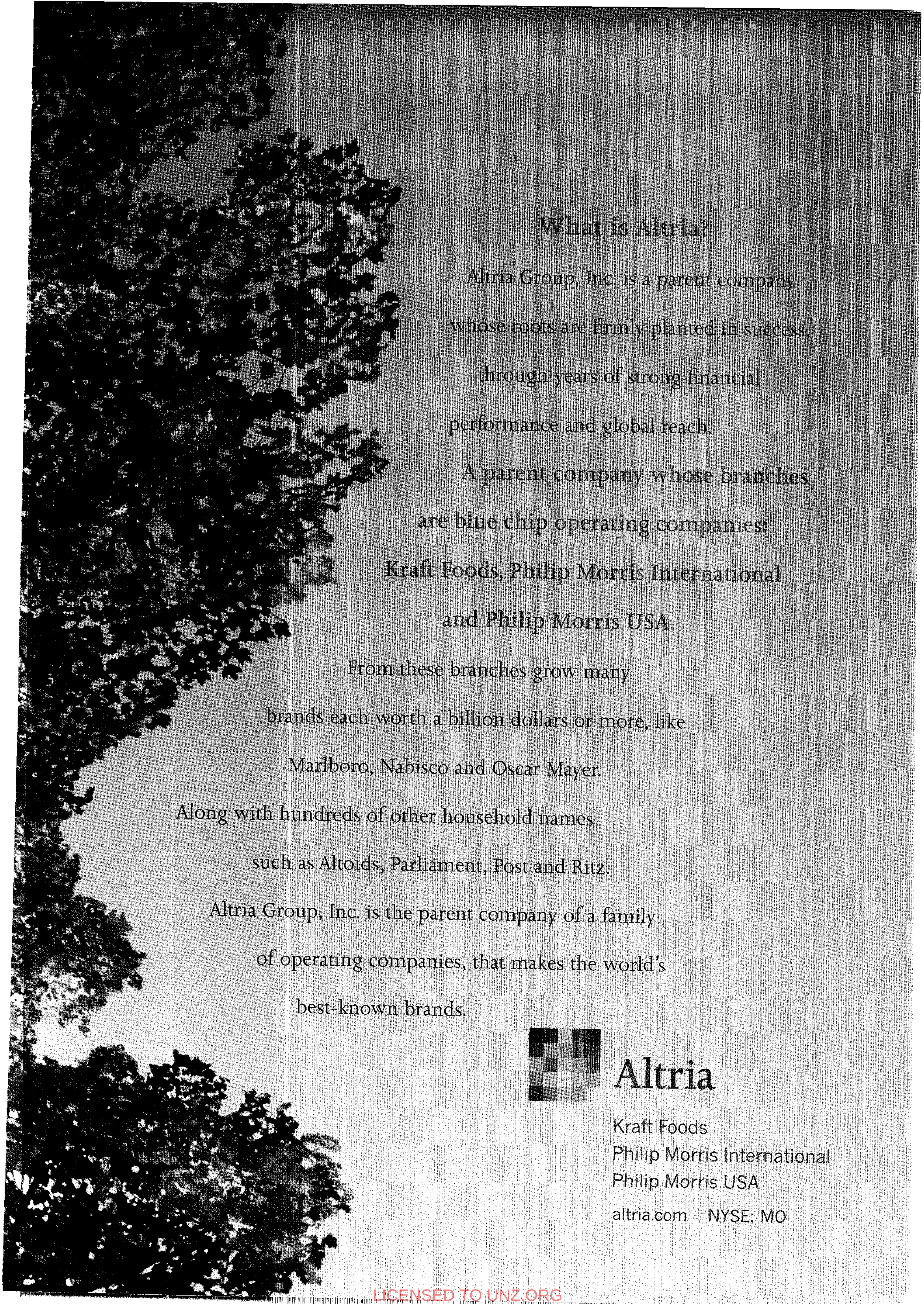

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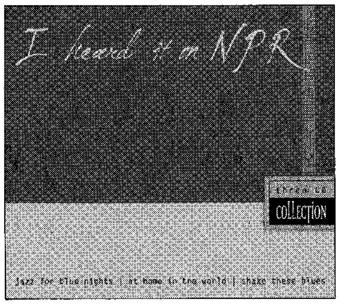
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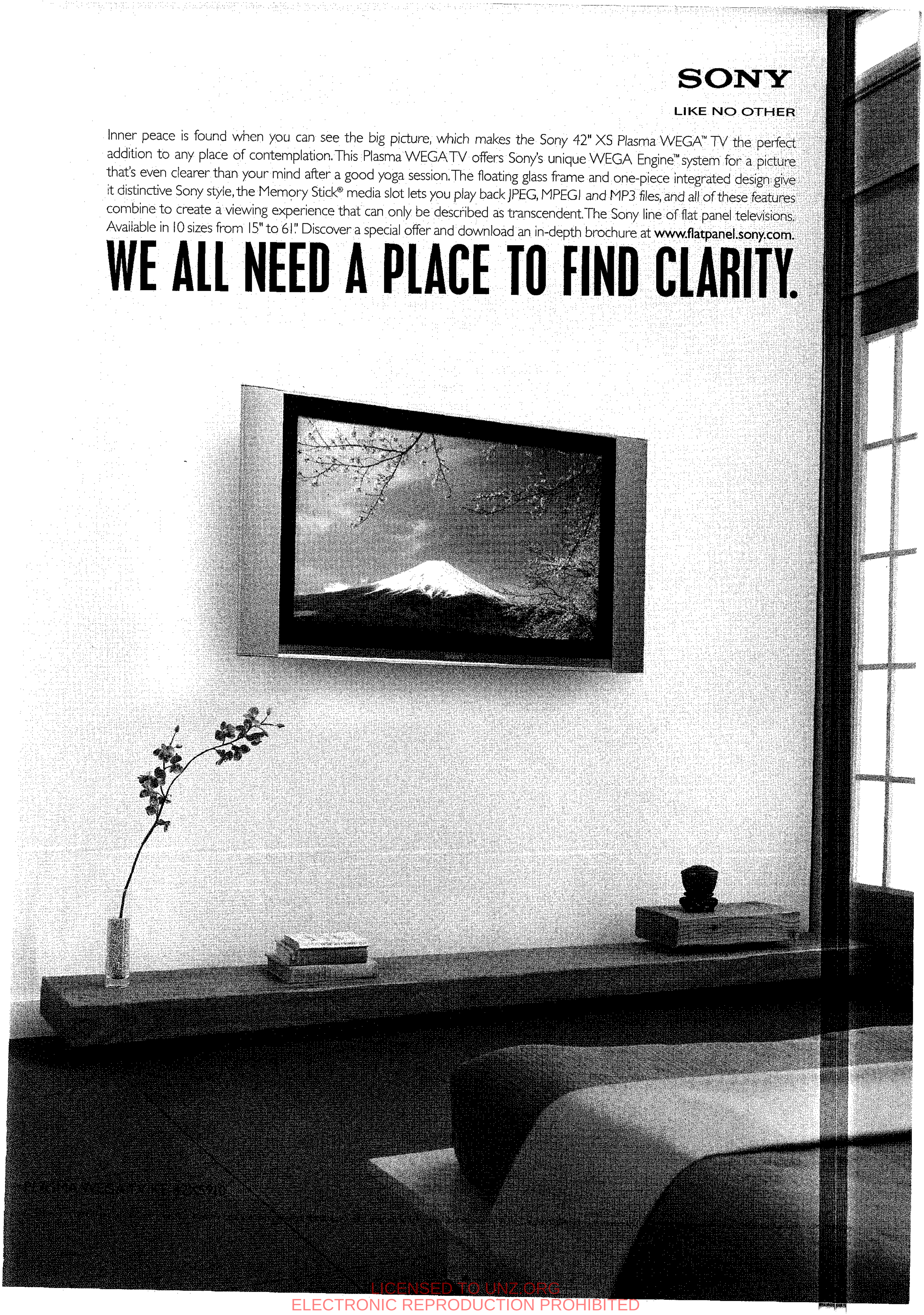

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Professor Hoffman, **Modern Magic: a Practical Treatise on the Art of Conjuring,** first edition, London, 1876. Estimate $1,500 to $2,500. **At auction Jan 15.**

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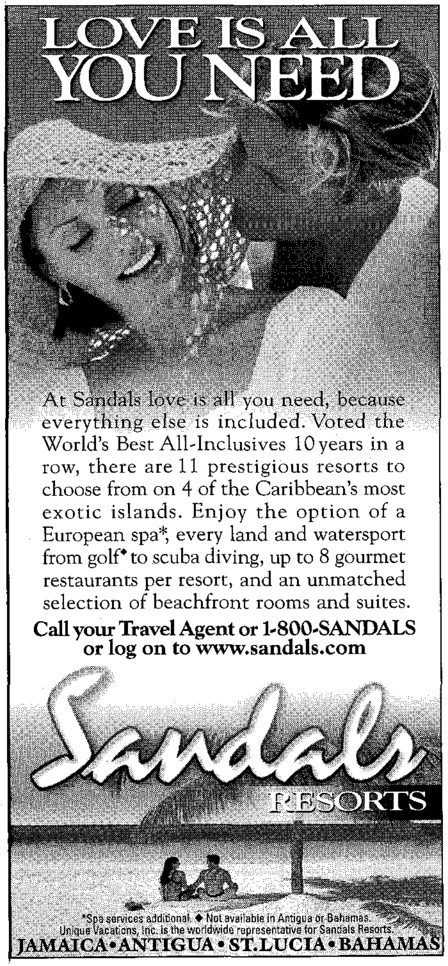

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CONTRIBUTORS

Lawrence Wright ("The Kingdom of Silence," p. 48) is working on his seventh book, which covers the events that led to September 11th. He has contributed to the magazine since 1992.

George Packer (Comment, p. 25) is the author of "The Village of Waiting" and "Blood of the Liberals."

Cathleen Schine ("Dog Trouble," p. 32) has published six novels, including, most recently, "She Is Me."

Graham Chapman (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 41), who died in 1989, was one of the originators of "Monty Python's Flying Circus." This piece is taken from "Back to the Trees," a collection of his essays and stories due to come out in England next fall.

Lara Vapnyar (Fiction, p. 76) has just published a collection of short stories, "There Are Jews in My House."

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Richard Wilbur (Poem, p. 70) received the Wallace Stevens Award in 2003. He has also received the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. His most recent collection is "Mayflies: New Poems and Translations."

Saul Steinberg (Sketchbook, p. 74), who died in 1999, contributed regularly to *The New Yorker* for nearly sixty years.

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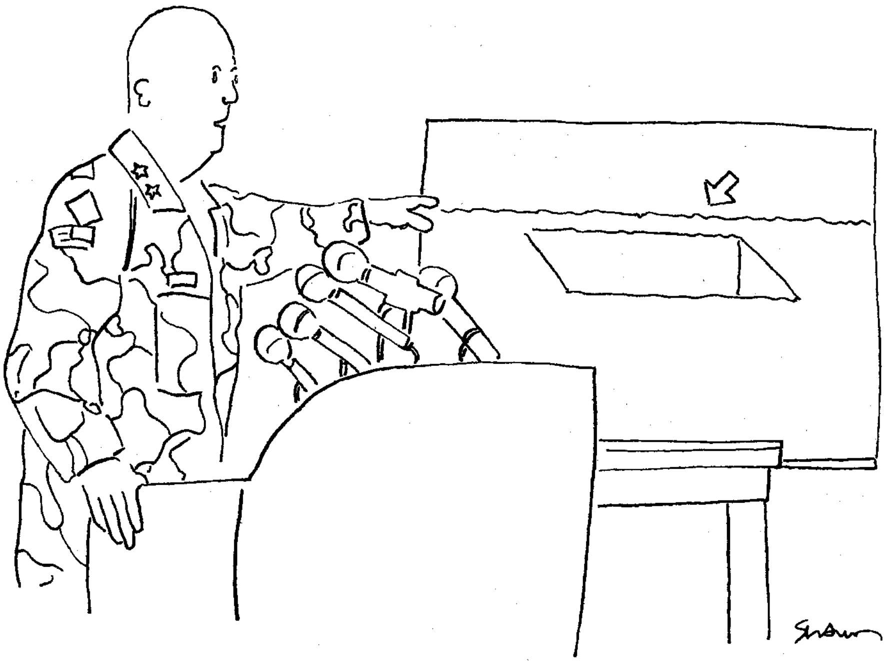
Anthony Lane (The Current Cinema, p. 89) is a film critic for the magazine.

Bruce McCall (The Back Page, p. 92) has published a new humor collection, "All Meat Looks Like South America." ♦



"And, since Mr. Hussein did not see his shadow, we predict only four more weeks of insurrection."

THE MAIL

FIXING ELECTIONS

Jeffrey Toobin's article on the astonishing heights—or, rather, the lows—that have now been reached by gerrymandering legislatures was an education ("The Great Election Grab," December 8th). It illustrated all too clearly that a cynical, self-serving manipulation of the process is what matters most, and that such ideas as fairness are for naïve, one-term losers. After learning about a voting district in Pennsylvania so bizarrely configured to Republican advantage that it is called the "upside-down Chinese dragon," can anyone seriously question voter apathy? One can only hope that the Supreme Court acts with a common sense, and a conscience, that have virtually disappeared from contemporary American governance.

Peter Goodwin
Nashville, Tenn.

Toobin describes the partisan political fighting over the congressional redistricting process, but he doesn't mention the underlying cause: the winner-take-all two-party election system. A proportional representation system, used by two-thirds of the world's major democracies, would remove the incentive for such fighting and also offer improved voter representation and interest compared with the existing system, which is so easily manipulated for political advantage. The question is: Will partisan politicians who now control the choice of their constituencies allow those constituencies the choice of a better process?

Doug Williams
Northbrook, Ill.

The Supreme Court is unlikely to give them to us, but what we really need are congressional districts drawn apolitically by a computer program that would not consider race, income, voting record, or party affiliation. The program could draw lines so that they would (1) equalize population in the districts, (2) minimize the sum of boundary lines, and (3) minimize the distances between the area of maximum population density in each district and that district's boundaries. The second condition would make the districts compact, and the third would make them center on existing communities. Some "minority-majority" districts would be created, but they would be based on residential patterns rather than on social engineering. Then our districts might indeed come close to making "one person, one vote" a reality.

David Wrench
Lake Oswego, Ore.

A virtue of the secret ballot is that one's vote cannot be used against one. But the software used in redistricting, as Toobin describes it, is precise enough to extrapolate information on actual voting—broken down by precincts and then enriched with other data—not just registration. Partisan redistricters then use an area's votes for one party to dilute the effect of residents' expected future votes, effectively punishing them. Voter registration is a public act and fair game for use in political maneuvering, but the actual vote should remain a private matter. While the precinct results of a vote must be public in the aggregate, that data should be off-limits for any purpose other than insuring accurate counts in an election.

Thomas Wright
Oak Park, Ill.

In the long run, the only solution to the problems that Toobin documents seems to be to remove the power of reapportionment from state legislatures and put it in the hands of a nonpartisan commission that can make decisions on the basis of what is in the best interests of all voters. Politicians, whose principal interest is self-preservation, cannot be trusted to perform this function.

Peter A. Downs
Lakewood, Colo.

•

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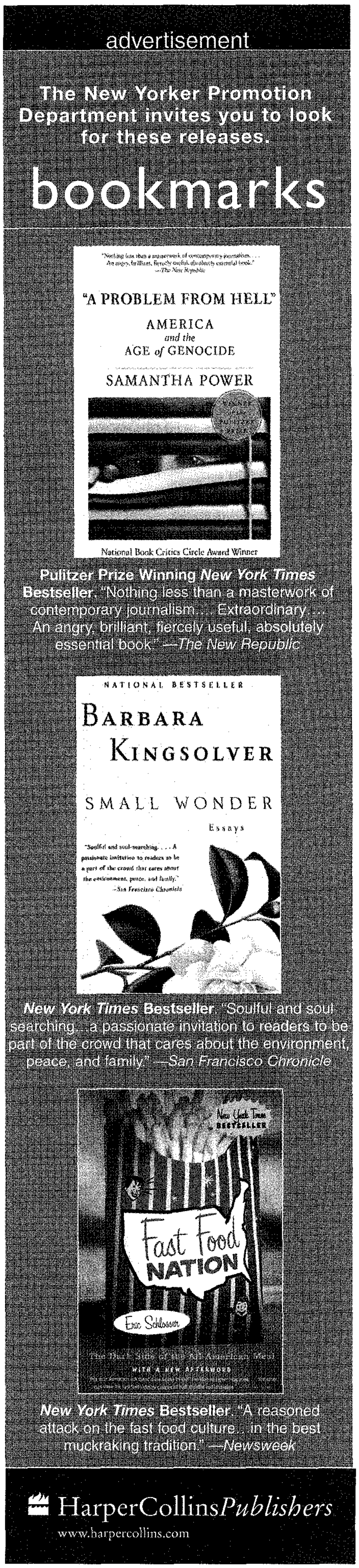
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THE ARCHITECTURE OF LOSS
New York Theatre Workshop presents a new play by Julia Cho, about an errant father and a missing son. Directed by Chay Yew. In previews. (83 E. 4th St. 212-460-5475.)

BROTHERS KARAMAZOV, PART II
Alexander Harrington presents the second part of his daring theatrical interpretation of Dostoyevsky's masterpiece. Opens Jan. 2 at 7. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710.)

OPENED RECENTLY

ANNA IN THE TROPICS
Nilo Cruz's simple, lyrical anecdote—about a Tampa, Florida, cigar factory in 1929, where a handsome "lector" (Jimmy Smits) reads "Anna Karenina" to the workers—is really a libretto for a musical, not a satisfying vehicle for the stage. Cruz's charming but thinly drawn characters cry out for song, not speech. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/1/03.) (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

AUNT DAN AND LEMON
Kristen Johnston is Aunt Dan and Lili Taylor is Lemon in the New Group's revival of Wallace Shawn's play about a friendship between an adult and a child. Directed by Scott Elliott. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

THE BOY FROM OZ
The charming, wildly hardworking performer Hugh Jackman has been put in the awkward position of having to prove that the Australian singer-songwriter Peter Allen—who was discovered by Judy Garland and who married her daughter Liza Minnelli—is worthy of our attention. Just this side of overly hunky, Jackman does everything he can to sell the show, and the girls in the audience love him. But he is undermined by the production that swirls around him. (10/27/03) (Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE CARETAKER
In Harold Pinter's breakthrough play from 1960, two brothers—Aston, who is slow and deliberate, and Mick, a presentable sociopath—allow an old drifter named Davies to stay in their house, tacitly inviting him to mend their cracked minds and howling hearts, as if he were the father they'd been waiting for all their lives. In the Roundabout's production, Patrick Stewart, as Davies, and Kyle MacLachlan, as Aston, perform well under David Jones's sensitive direction; Aidan Gillen, as Mick, is both lethal and adorable, a cuddly gutter rat. (11/17/03) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. Closes Jan. 4.)

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CAROLINE, OR CHANGE
Tony Kushner's bittersweet autobiographical saga about two stranded souls—eight-year-old Noah Gellman (Harrison Chad), who is suffering from the twin griefs of a recently deceased mother and a newly acquired stepmother, and his family's saturnine maid, Caroline Thibodeaux (Tonya Pinkins)—settles for no easy emotional solutions. Set in Louisiana in 1963, it takes the musical back to storytelling, to a moral universe, to a dissection of American society, and to folklore—that is, the lore of the folk, both black and white. With music by Jeanine Tesori. Directed by George C. Wolfe. (12/8/03) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

CIRCUS OZ
The fourteen-member Australian company of clowns, gymnasts, contortionists, and one BMX biker make merry during a six-week run at the New Victory. (209 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Through Jan. 11.)

THE COOK
The gusto of Eduardo Machado's first-rate play is matched by the direction of Michael John Garcés, who begins the evening with a party in the lobby that segues into the first act, set amid the hubbub of a kitchen in a Havana mansion in 1958. It is the last pre-Castro moment, and Machado uses the kitchen as a metaphor to examine the oppression and betrayals of both exile and revolution over a span of forty years. Zabryna Guevara gives a luminous performance as the adroit, loyal cook, who keeps faith with her reactionary mistress only to learn in her old age that she herself has not been kept in mind. (Intar 53, at 508 W. 53rd St. 212-279-4200. Closes Jan. 4.)

DINNER WITH DEMONS
Jonathan Reynolds' chatty play is a kind of therapy session with food. He grouses about his mother and reminisces about old loves while deep-frying a turkey and whipping up a soufflé, and mulls over his relationship with his father as he flips an apple galette. As the smell of cooking permeates the theatre, the audience oohs and ahs at each culinary feat, as if Reynolds were a magician. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

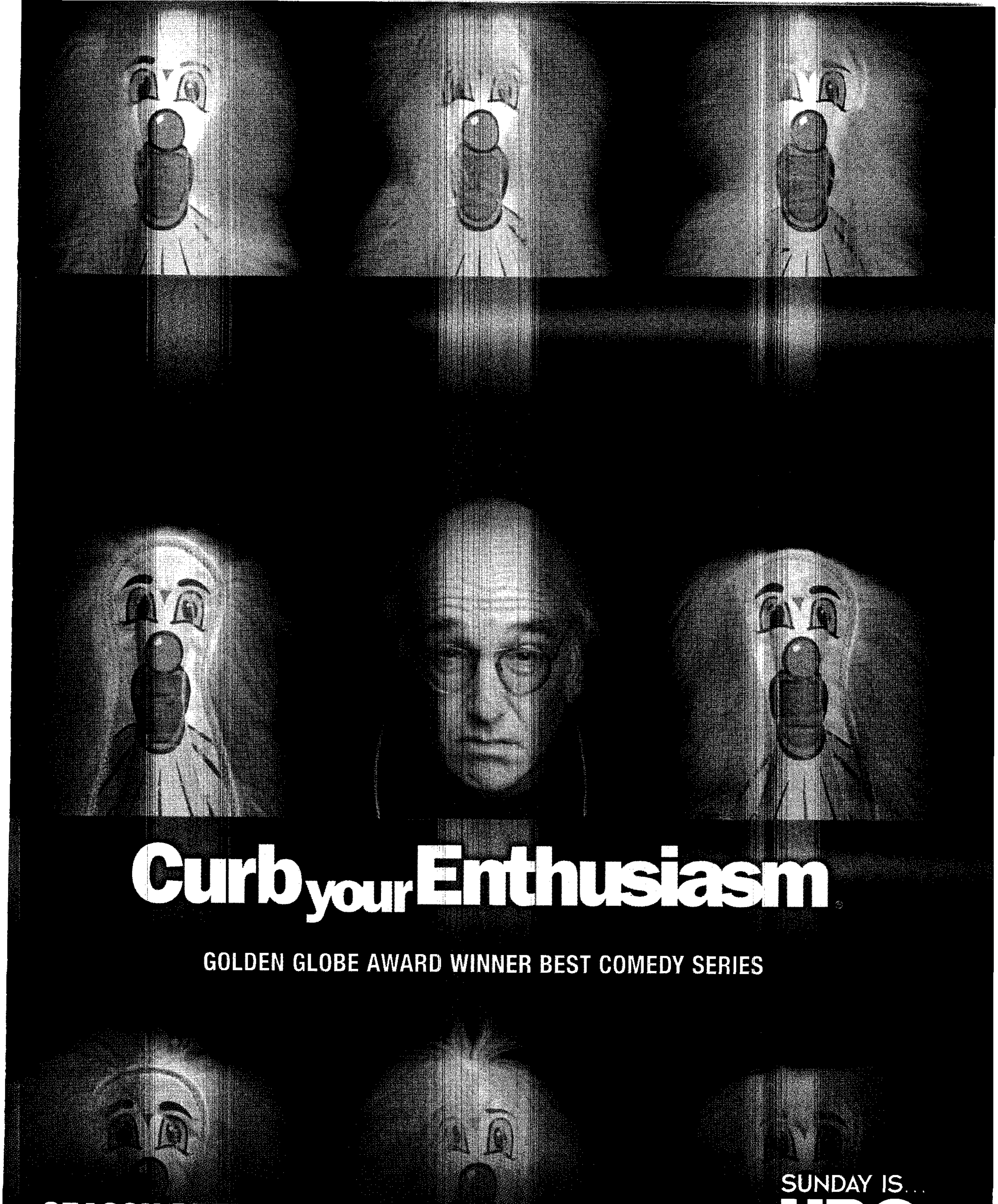
DUET
The ghost of Sarah Bernhardt drops by Eleonora Duse's dressing room one night in Pittsburgh in Otho Eskin's new play. Pamela Payton-Wright, as Duse, and Laura Esterman, as Bernhardt, give lustrous performances, managing to convey the actresses' vastly different acting styles without slipping into mimicry. Robert Emmet Lunney plays the various men in the women's lives. Cleanly directed by Ludovica Villar-Hauser. (Greenwich Street Theatre, 547 Greenwich St. 212-352-3101. Closes Jan. 4.)

FRAME 312
In Keith Reddin's play, set in the nineties, Lynette (Mary Beth Peil), a woman who possesses the original Zapruder film, is at a breaking point after keeping the footage secret for years. Flashbacks to the sixties illuminate her dilemma, showing how the young Lynette (Mandy Siegfried), as an eager-beaver editorial assistant at Time-Life, was entrusted with the reel by her dying boss (the terrific Larry Bryggman). Karen Kohlhaas directs. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

GOLDA'S BALCONY
In William Gibson's one-woman show about Golda Meir—the Russian immigrant from Wisconsin who helped create the state of Israel and eventually became its Prime Minister—Tovah Feldshuh shows how national and family passions blend in the heart, making dispassionate judgment impossible. Directed by Scott Schwartz. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

GOLF: THE MUSICAL
A revue of songs inspired by the sport plays at the studio theatre at the John Houseman. (450 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

HENRY IV
A hero sandwich of sorts, Dakin Matthews's adaptation of Shakespeare's two-part chronicle of the wayward Prince Hal's succession to his father's throne is stuffed into one almost four-hour evening. As a study of public and private rebellion, "Henry IV" is as savvy today as it was when the first part was minted, in the winter of 1596, yet this production is emotionally lopsided. Ethan Hawke is excellent as the brave and bright Hotspur, but Michael Hayden's Hal (he replaced Billy Crudup in the production a month before performances began) conveys no real sense of the prince and brings little edge or patrician sang-froid to his character's louche liveliness—undermining his rapport with Falstaff (Kevin Kline). Directed by Jack O'Brien. (12/1/03) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)



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I AM MY OWN WIFE

Nothing can prepare you for this play's hero, Lothar Berfelde, a real-life German transvestite and collector who lived for decades in East Berlin as Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, surviving first the Nazis, then the Stasi. As Jefferson Mays brilliantly embodies her, she is a meticulous, modest soul. What is sensational about her is her normality. The playwright, Doug Wright ("Quills"), conceives the evening as a sort of detective story to uncover the facts of Charlotte's life, and Mays plays all the characters with thrilling credibility. Strongly directed by Moisés Kaufman. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

JOSH KORNBLUTH'S LOVE AND TAXES

In his acidly funny monologue, about how his money problems (eighty thousand dollars of debt, following seven years of tax delinquency) stalled his marriage plans, Josh Kornbluth ("Red Diaper Baby," "Haiku Tunnel") takes shots at everyone from the I.R.S. to Hollywood producers to his Bay Area attorney to, ultimately, himself. (Bank Street Theatre, 155 Bank St. 212-868-4444.)

THE LADY NEXT DOOR

In the Folksbiene's spirited revival of a comedy from 1915 by Leon Kobrin, a love triangle between Eastern European immigrants turns a tenement into a Yiddish Melrose Place. With English supertitles. Directed by Allen Lewis Rickman. (Folksbiene Yiddish Theatre, J.C.C., 334 Amsterdam Ave. 212-239-6200. Closes Jan. 4.)

THE LAST LETTER

Kathleen Chalfant plays a Russian Jew in Ukraine during the Second World War, in a new play directed by the documentary filmmaker Frederick Wiseman, who adapted it from a chapter of Vasily Grossman's novel "Life and Fate." (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-239-6200.)

LYSISTRATA

Aristophanes's play about women who swear off sex to persuade their husbands to end their incessant warring has been translated and updated by the late David Lee Jiranek—the action is still set in ancient Athens, but the language and the props are modern. Elise Stone shines as a deadpan Lysistrata, and the rest of the cast, ably directed by David Fuller, delivers the show's outrageous physical comedy without drowning out the message. (Bouwerie Lane Theatre, 330 Bowery, at Bond St. 212-677-0060.)

NEVER GONNA DANCE

Based on the classic 1936 movie "Swing Time," starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, this effervescent new musical is a scrapbook of Depression-era reality made Art Deco shiny. While trying to make good in Gotham, Lucky Garnett (Noah Racey) meets Penny (Nancy Lemenager), an innocent dance instructor with strawberry-blond sausage curls, and they join a dance competition. Racey is a strong dancer with a clean line, but he doesn't try to imitate Astaire or hide how hard this ambitious show is to perform. The feline and ferocious Deidre Goodwin is thrilling as Velma, one of their competitors. With songs by P. G. Wodehouse, Ira Gershwin, Johnny Mercer, and others. Directed by Michael Greif and choreographed by Jerry Mitchell. (12/15/03) (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

The black South African playwright and actor John Kani still has a few lessons to learn from his mentor and frequent collaborator, Athol Fugard. Whereas Fugard's domestic dramas about political unrest are the most clear-eyed vision of apartheid we have, Kani's play is sentimental and contrived, making invidious comparisons between the South Africans who toughed out life in the townships and the shirkers who hid out from the struggle abroad. Sipho Makhaya (Kani) is the father of the docile Thando (Warona Seane), whose English cousin, Mandisa (Esmeralda Bihl), arrives in the Old Country with a portfolio of fashion drawings and lots of liquor and cigarettes. Mandisa upsets everything, and the obvious and stilted way that the plot unfolds taxes the audience's patience: it's South Africa for beginners. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

THE RADIO CITY CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR

The Rockettes perform their annual kickfest, alongside Santa, his reindeer, and assorted elves. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 212-247-4777. Through Jan. 4.)

The Sanctum, in the Tribeca Grand (see Night Life).

THE REGARD EVENING

Bill Irwin's postmodern love song to vaudeville uses hat tricks, ventriloquism, trapdoors, and two trampolines. The production, the second in the Signature Theatre Company's Irwin season, combines "The Regard of Flight," from 1983, with its sequel, "In the Same Regard" (2003), which gives the Internet a well-deserved comeuppance. The rubber-faced Irwin, in stripy pajamas and nightcap and various other costumes, struggles in vain to please two masters: Doug Skinner, the straight man, who moderates and plays the piano and ukulele, and Michael O'Connor, as a pesky drama critic and bossy director. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

ROSE'S DILEMMA

Patricia Hodges stars in a Manhattan Theatre Club production of a new play by Neil Simon, about a famous novelist who resolves to write a blockbuster. Directed by Lynne Meadow. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

SAVE ME THE WALTZ

The Thirteenth Street Rep presents Enrico Garzilli's musical about F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. Directed by Robert Kreis. (50 W. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

SCHMALTZ

Mark Zeller's souped-up Catskills-style show is built around the four pillars of Jewish humor: food, guilt, Jewish mothers, and therapy. Zeller and his wife, Dana Zeller-Alexis, play Benny, a middle-aged Jew who relives his childhood traumas by remembering what he ate during each of them, and his New Agey wife, Irina, who uses hypnosis to try to cure his neuroses. Directed by Eric Nightengale. (78th Street Theatre Lab, 236 W. 78th St. 212-868-4444.)

SHOLOM ALEICHEM: NOW YOU'RE TALKING!

In this traditional one-man show, Saul Reichlin dramatizes Sholom Aleichem's shtetl memories, conducting a nostalgic survey of Kasrilevkeh through a dozen stories that take full advantage of his versatile and expressive voice, which ranges in timbre from high to low, and from gruff to sweet. (DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE STORY

Tracey Scott Wilson's stark poetry resonates in the imagination long after the drama has unfolded. Inspired by the story of Janet Cooke, the Washington *Post* reporter who had to return a Pulitzer Prize for fabricating a story, the play follows the trajectory of Yvonne (Erika Alexander), a black newspaper journalist who makes up facts to advance her career. Her lover, an editor named Jeff (Stephen Kunken), is white. What would Yvonne be like if she were white and male? How much of the self is based on the racial and sexual role-playing we perform to be recognized in our society? These are interesting questions, asked in a voice that is deeply emotional, deeply intellectual, and deeply musical. (12/22 & 29/03) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

TALES FROM THE MANHATTAN WOODS

Frederick Stroppel has written a new book and lyrics for Strauss's "Die Fledermaus," turning the comic opera into a campy romp that takes place not in Vienna but in contemporary New York, in an Upper East Side penthouse, at a pretentious SoHo party, and in a dingy Brooklyn prison. The cast, in fine voice, has a grand time with deliberately stilted lyrics like "The days will dribble out like ketchup / till I have you in my embrace." The doe-eyed Elizabeth Hillebrand stands out as a naïve personal assistant. (Wings Theatre, 154 Christopher St. 212-627-2961.)

A VERY MERRY UNAUTHORIZED CHILDREN'S SCIENTOLOGY PAGEANT

Les Frères Corbusier follow this summer's mischievous "President Harding Is a Rock Star" with a new musical that sends up the spooky mythos of the Church of Scientology. Against a pastel backdrop that resembles a Sunday-school wall hanging, a cast of fresh-faced, berobed children recount L. Ron Hubbard's teachings, mostly in song. Twelve-year-old Jordan Wolfe is side-splitting as the church's founder; he perfectly projects the dippy magnetism of a future cult leader. The show, which is only an hour long, feels like an extended

TOMER HANUKA

Monty Python skit. Conceived and directed by Alex Timbers, with music and lyrics by Kyle Jarrow. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Closes Jan. 4.)

WICKED
A new musical telling the backstory of "The Wizard of Oz" is an exercise in high camp. "The Wizard of Oz" was dedicated to hope; "Wicked" is dedicated to irony. The Wicked Witch, Elphaba (played by the excellent Idina Menzel), turns out to be good, while Glinda the Good (Kristen Chenoweth) is exposed as a smug, ambitious, manipulative bitch, with little talent for sorcery. (11/10/03) (Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.)

WONDERFUL TOWN
The musical from 1953, about two spirited Ohio sisters' adventures in Greenwich Village, is a buoyant, beautifully staged revival that gives us back a thrilling glimpse of the gaiety, wit, confidence, and craft of the American musical in its populist heyday. The show boasts a well-played, fizzy Leonard Bernstein score and a terrific set of Comden and Green lyrics that stop the show several times, with a special huzzah for "One Hundred Easy Ways (to Lose a Man)." The excellent cast is superbly directed and choreographed by Kathleen Marshall. As Eileen, Jennifer Westfeldt swings, but Donna Murphy, as her sardonic, droll sister Ruth, owns the stage. This is one of those musicals that made the myth of Manhattan as an isle of joy. And after the sublimely silly seven-minute "Conga!" you almost believe it. (Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4747.

AVENUE Q
Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747.

BECKETT/ALBEE
Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.

BLUE MAN GROUP
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 212-254-4370.

CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Jan. 4.)

CARNIVAL KNOWLEDGE
SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-239-6200.

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF
Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

CHICAGO
Ambassador, 215 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.

DE LA GUARDA
Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 212-239-6200.

FAME ON 42ND STREET
Little Shubert, 422 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY
Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.

42ND STREET
Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.

GYPSY
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

HAIRSPRAY
Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100.

I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.

THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.

MAMMA MIA!
Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-563-5544.

MOVIN' OUT
Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100.

NOBODY DON'T LIKE YOGI
Lamb's Theatre, 130 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

PRIVATE JOKES, PUBLIC PLACES
Theatre at the Center for Architecture, 536 LaGuardia Pl. 212-239-6200.

THE PRODUCERS
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-921-8000.

THE RETREAT FROM MOSCOW
Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

THE RIVALS
Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.

STOMP
Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 212-477-2477.

TAKE ME OUT
Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Jan. 4.)

THE THING ABOUT MEN
Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200.

THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLIE
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100.

TRUMBO
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.

URINETOWN
Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Jan. 18.)

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
In Balanchine's "Nutcracker," the Christmas party is gemütlich, the nightmare scary, the tree tall, and Candyland exactly what it should be: a child's dream of heaven. After the holiday ballet's final three performances this week, City Ballet kicks off its winter repertory season and yearlong celebration of Balanchine's centennial with "A Midsummer Night's Dream." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. "The Nutcracker": Dec. 31 at 7, Jan. 3 at 2 and 8, and Jan. 4 at 3. ♦ "A Midsummer Night's Dream": Jan. 6 at 7:30. Through Feb. 29.)

SAVION GLOVER
The last time Glover performed at the Joyce, in 1991, he was a seventeen-year-old wunderkind who stole the show as a guest star. This time, he's had the stage to himself for three weeks straight, the longest run ever granted a tap dancer. The format is informal, but expect extraordinary, exploratory improvisations by Glover (he's been deep into Coltrane lately), as well as precise group numbers he choreographed for his latest company, Tii Dii. With its equal-gender ratio, the group is a testament to a seldom noticed aspect of Glover's influence: the rise of hard-hitting women. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Dec. 31 at 5, Jan. 2 and Jan. 4 at 2 and Jan. 3 at 2 and 8.)

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE
Now in its forty-fifth year, the company faces a familiar problem: finding a repertory worthy of its superlative dancers. The answers this season include new productions of old hits—Judith Jamison's "Hymn" (1993) and Donald McKayle's "Rainbow 'Round My Shoulder" (1959)—and four premières. In Robert Battle's underwhelming new "Juba," a quartet performs an agonized cakewalk, arms extended as if awaiting shackles. Alonzo King's "Heart Song" is more ambitious. Structured episodically around Arabic spiritual songs, it's a kind of Islamist retelling of Ailey's "Revelations," in praise of Allah instead of Jesus. The work doesn't approach the brilliance of Ailey's masterpiece—nothing in the repertory does—but it showcases strong dancing and enough costume changes for a fashion show. All four new offerings—including Dwight Rhoden's "Bounty Verses," for thirteen dancers, and Jennifer Muller's "Footprints," a meditation on the irretractability of snap decisions—are performed in the season's final week. ♦ Dec. 31 at 8: "Following the Subtle Current Upstream," "Hymn," and "Revelations." ♦ Jan. 1

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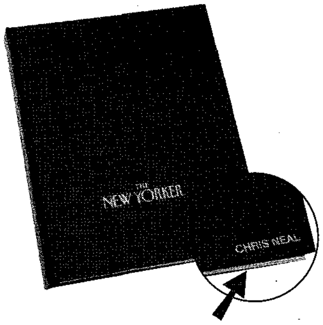

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at 8: "The Winter in Lisbon," "Juba," "Treading," and "Revelations." ♦ Jan. 2 at 8: "Following the Subtle Current Upstream," "Episodes," and "Revelations." ♦ Jan. 3 at 2: "The Winter in Lisbon," "Bounty Verses," and "Revelations." ♦ Jan. 3 at 8: Ailey classics. ♦ Jan. 4 at 3: "Footprints," "Heart Song," and "The Winter in Lisbon." ♦ Jan. 4 at 7:30: "Hymn," "Juba," and "Revelations." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

"ALTOGETHER DIFFERENT"
The Joyce Theatre's lineup for its annual festival begins with John Kelly's autobiographical medley "The Skin I'm In." Joined by five ballet dancers, who do more miming than dancing, Kelly relives moments of his past performances—as Orpheus, Egon Schiele, and other characters—and connects the scenes with videos of those performances and tales from his private life. Other fictional characters are introduced via personal ads projected on a screen. The Joyce may not be the ideal venue for this show, which seems to demand a more intimate, night-clubby space. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Jan. 6 at 8. Through Jan. 11. The festival continues through Jan. 18.)

"SUNDAYS @ THREE"
As part of the 92nd Street Y's series of works in progress, Ellis Wood/WoodDance presents sections from "Hereticus," a four-part all-female quartet inspired by the martyrdom of Joan of Arc and divided into sections corresponding to the four elements. In "Air," Leslie Johnson tells a story with angry puffs of speech that send her adversaries tumbling away. In "Earth," mud and flowers mix in a colorful mess as Jennifer Phillips successfully fends off three women who are trying to bury her. So far, Woods has yet to fully connect the

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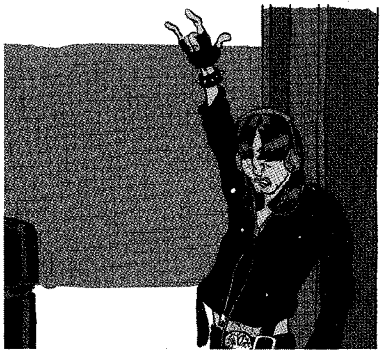
POP NOTES

A dozen favorite CDs from 2003, listed alphabetically, and another dozen that merit mention.

Basement Jaxx, "Kish Kash" (Astralwerks)—The third release from the British producers Simon Ratcliffe and Felix Buxton features guest vocals from the likes of Siouxsie Sioux, JC Chasez, and Me'shell Ndegéocello, who sets forth the album's mission on the second song, "Right Here's the Spot": "I wanna make you dance . . . I'm going to get to you." Ratcliffe and Buxton know how to deploy the bells and whistles of contemporary dance music, and they're also capable of surprises, as they demonstrate in "Supersonic," which is enriched by the throaty growlings of the sixty-five-year-old Jamaican cabaret singer Totlyn Jackson.

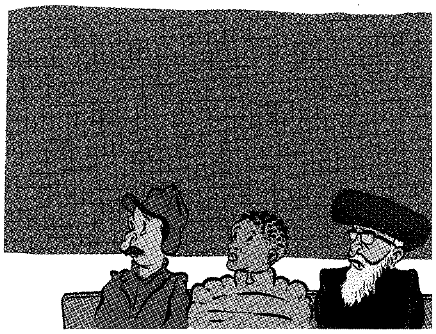


Vic Chesnutt, "Silver Lake" (New West)—Chesnutt is one of pop music's most emotional singers: he can do anguish and resignation better than almost anyone. He's also a fearless songwriter whose odd, prolix lyrics would be rough going were it not for his beautiful melodies. This is one of Chesnutt's rootsiest efforts, and also one of his strongest, containing everything from a ballad written from the point of view of a Styrofoam cooler to a reminiscence of his own convalescence from a car accident that left him paralyzed. The gospel-tinged closer, "In My Way, Yes," is especially moving.

Dizzee Rascal, "Boy in da Corner" (Matador)—One of hip-hop's greatest strengths is its ability to communicate a sense of place, whether N.W.A.'s Compton or Jay-Z's Marcy Houses. This début record, which won England's prestigious Mercury Prize, is firmly rooted in East London's council tenancies. While it marks the emergence of an immensely talented rapper with a minimalist, garage-inflected production style, what stands out upon repeated listens is the writing, particularly in the teen-pregnancy anthem "I Luv U," which was first released when Dizzee Rascal was only sixteen.

Kelis, "Tasty" (Arista)—An unholy cross between Beyoncé and Bette Davis, Kelis hybridized modern R. & B. and vintage rock-soul on her début, "Kaleidoscope," back in 1999. But "Kaleidoscope," with its barbed, strange bunch of Neptunes songs, didn't sell, and her follow-up, "Wonderland," wasn't even released Stateside. "Tasty" marks Kelis's triumphant return, both with the Neptunes (they provided her with the single "Milkshake," which is as catchy and as lascivious as early-eighties Prince) and without them (elsewhere, the singer collaborates, usually to great effect, with Raphael Saadiq, Andre 3000 of OutKast, and even her fiancé, Nas).

Ted Leo and the Pharmacists, "Hearts of Oak" (Lookout!)—In an era when the general populace has been hoodwinked into thinking that corporate acts such as Good Charlotte represent the new face of punk rock, bands like Ted Leo and the Pharmacists stand out. Leo's lyrics are politically passionate and tongue-twistingly erudite, and the Pharmacists serve up a heavy dose of both hardcore intensity and New Wave melody.



The Libertines, "Up the Bracket" (Rough Trade)—Public drunkenness, squabbling, even accusations of burglary: this English foursome got as much attention for living up to their name as they did for their music. That's a shame, because the group recalls the Clash, the Kinks, and other rebellious British masters while managing to forge an utterly original sound. Their début record rockets from the sweet shuffle of "Radio America" to the edgy and dramatic "The Good Old Days" to the rueful anthem "What a Waster."

Shelby Lynne, "Identity Crisis" (Capitol)—Opening with the beautifully sung, subtly bitter "Telephone," Lynne's new album forgoes the sleek production of her previous record in favor of a more homespun sound. Lynne wrote all the songs here. They range from country ballads ("Lonesome," which sounds like a lost Patsy Cline gem) to gospel-tinged rave-ups ("10 Rocks") and tough rock numbers ("Gotta Be Better"). Her vocals, pushed way out in front of the mix, are reminders that an intimate connection between performer and material makes for an intimate connection between material and audience.

Van Morrison, "What's Wrong with This Picture" (Blue Note)—The venerable Irish bard is on a jazz label now, but this isn't exactly a jazz record, just more of the idiosyncratic Celtic soul that Morrison has been creating for four decades. Still, the move to a new home seems to have energized Morrison both as a singer and as a songwriter, and if the album finds him complaining too much about the draining effects of fame—he's not exactly Britney Spears—there's a handful of songs that should move immediately into his large canon, including the ruefully funny title track, the folky "Little Village," and the dead-on Stax soul of "Get On With the Show."

OutKast, "Speakerboxxx/The Love Below" (Arista)—The most hyped record of the year, OutKast's fifth album finds Big Boi and Andre 3000 going their separate ways, possibly for good, as the group delivers a double CD that is in fact two solo albums. Big Boi's contribution is the more consistent of the two; it remains tethered both to contemporary hip-hop and to the group's freaky, P-Funk-influenced past with such hits (or hits-to-be) as "GhettoMusick," "The Way You Move," and "The Rooster." Andre 3000's half, on the other hand, has moments of transcendent brilliance—especially the lead single, "Hey Ya!," an irresistible confection of psychedelic soul—alongside curiously self-indulgent passages.

The Shins, "Chutes Too Narrow" (Sub Pop)—This Albuquerque band's début, "Oh, Inverted World," had plenty of adherents. The follow-up should have disciples. With better writing, better playing, and better singing, the album illustrates the breadth of the lead singer and songwriter James Mercer's vision; the cuts, from the opener, "Kissing the Lipless," to the emotionally powerful "Saint Simon," are elevated by accessible pop hooks and literate but unpretentious lyrics.

Sidestepper, "3 A.M. (In Beats We Trust)" (Palm Pictures)—During an extended sojourn in Bogotá, the British producer Richard Blair met the guitarist and vocalist Iván Benavides, of the Colombian alternative group Bloque, and together they set out to explore the intersection of Latin-American music and twenty-first-century electronica. On their third collaboration, the pair focusses on Caribbean music, particularly reggae. The result is a warm, inviting hybrid of tropical textures (mellow bass lines, bright horn passages) and high-tech effects (echoes, loops, and synthesized beats).

The White Stripes, "Elephant" (V2)—While many of the bands at the forefront of the recent garage-rock revival have petered out, the White Stripes picked up momentum with their fourth album, which is powered by Jack White's guitar and vocals and Meg White's atavistic drumming. "Elephant" isn't a radical departure from earlier works so much as a natural evolution; in fact, some songs seem to speak directly to older material. Throughout, the pair kick up an unholy racket; it's not too much of an overstatement to call them a pocket Led Zeppelin.

Also noteworthy: John Cale, "Hobo Sapiens" (EMI); June Carter Cash, "Wildwood Flower" (Dualtone); Death Cab for Cutie, "Transatlanticism" (Barsuk); Drive-By Truckers, "Decoration Day" (New West); Kathleen Edwards, "Failer" (Rounder); Fountains of Wayne, "Welcome Interstate Managers" (S-Curve); Metallica, "St. Anger" (Elektra); North Mississippi Allstars, "Polaris" (ATO/Tone-Cool); the Raveonettes, "Chain Gang of Love" (Columbia); Damien Rice, "O" (Vector); Amy Rigby, "Til the Wheels Fall Off" (Signature Sounds); the Wrens, "The Meadowlands" (Absolutely Kosher).

ZOHAR LAZAR

dancing to Daniel Bernard Roumain's gorgeous, emotive music—something that the audience might quiz her about in the Q. & A. that follows the show. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Jan. 4 at 3.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

JANE'S ADDICTION
Perry Farrell and company's much ballyhooed reunion album earlier this year failed to measure up to what they did in their ribald, late-eighties heyday—blame it on age, sobriety, or domesticity. But even a mellowed Jane's Addiction cranks out a beefy hybrid of libidinous bombast and Zeppelinesque pageantry. The gradually attenuating Antichrist **Marilyn Manson** opens. (Madison Square Garden. 212-307-7171. Dec. 31 at 9.)

DISCO BISCUITS
They may have a silly name, but they're serious about their music. Seriously groovy, that is. Formed in the mid-nineties at the University of Pennsylvania, the Biscuits have risen to the top of the jam-band scene through hard work and thoughtful experimentation. In concert they've been known to mix classical and jazz passages into their electronica-fuelled sets. (Hammerstein Ballroom, Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. 212-307-7171. Dec. 31 at 9.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BARBÈS
376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-965-9177)—Dec. 31: The **Zagnut Circus Orkestar**, a Balkan brass band, ignores the holiday altogether. They promise no champagne and no countdown. Jan. 3: The **Moonlighters** are a charming local group with a penchant for swinging Hawaiian tunes from the twenties and thirties such as "Hula Blues" and "Honolulu March," along with a few originals in the same style.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Dec. 31: The sharp Hammond-organ-driven retro jazz and funk of **Soulive** and the hardworking New Orleans band the **Radiators.** Jan. 1: **Marc Brownstein** and **Jon Gutwillig** of the Disco Biscuits (see Concerts) recover from the holidays with an acoustic set. Jan. 2-3: The Radiators get a little help from the saxophonist **Maceo Parker,** a veteran of James Brown's legendary JBs and a pivotal member of the Parliament/Funkadelic empire. Jan. 6: **Vince Neil.** Just as his former band's back catalogue gets reissued as a deluxe boxed set (blazing a new frontier in bad taste with the title "Music to Crash Your Car To, Volume 1"), the erstwhile Mötley Crüe vocalist Neil continues his solo career. Apparently unable to play nice with his former comrades long enough to have a proper reunion, Neil peppers his live set with a healthy helping of Crüe standards.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Dec. 29-31: **Patti Smith** and her band have been in the recording studio recently, so expect some surprises at their traditional year-end performances. Jackson Smith, the son of Patti and the late guitarist Fred (Sonic) Smith, opens the shows with his Detroit band, **Back in Spades.**

CUTTING ROOM
19 W. 24th St. (212-691-1900)—**Garland Jeffreys** came of age in the late sixties, but it wasn't until the following decade that he broke through, as part of the tide of post-punk troubadours that included Elvis Costello and Joe Jackson. He peaked with the 1977 album "Ghost Writer," which includes the hit "Wild in the Streets," but Jeffreys, who's here on Dec. 31 with his band the Coney Island Playboys, has yet to stop exploring the links between rock, race, and rebellion.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Jan. 3: The **Roots** and friends. Hip-hop groups generally aren't known for their musicianship, but this Philadelphia outfit has built its reputation on using real instruments to create an authentically funky, quintessentially musical (as opposed to digital) backdrop.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Dec. 31: Born from the ashes of the equally hushed Galaxie 500, Dean Wareham's **Luna** proves that you don't have to make a big noise to burn brightly. A longtime favorite of the Lower East Side music scene, Luna has built a substantial following based on their endearing, lo-fi music, which is full of references to their downtown-Manhattan forefathers, the Velvet Underground and Television. With the **Mendoza Line,** a literate ensemble from Brooklyn by way of Athens, Georgia, that specializes in sweet country-esque music.

NORTHSIX
66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—Dec. 31: **Versus,** a long-running New York combo with a gift for Sonic Youth-style droning.

SANCTUM
Tribeca Grand Hotel, 2 Sixth Ave., at White St. (212-519-6800)—This intimate lounge, with its angular furniture, futuristic chandeliers, and dark-wood panelling, is the perfect hideaway for a late-night recovery from the rush of the holidays and any New Year's excesses. The drinks, which were created by Sasha Petrasky (who is known for the exquisite cocktails at his semi-private downtown bar, Milk & Honey), include a wasabi Bloody Mary, a delicious blackberry fizz, and the Cat's Meow, which is made from coffee liqueur and dark rum. But the real tonic is an off-the-menu speciality called the Silver Lining, a frothy concoction made with egg whites. Just the thing for making a fresh start.

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—Jan. 1: **Basement Bhangra,** a monthly party featuring ecstatic dance music that fuses an ancient Punjabi harvest festival with the technological wonders of underground London.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Through Jan. 3: **Andrea Marcovicci** is at work in the Oak Room, performing the songs of Frank Loesser ("Guys and Dolls," "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying"). Starting on Jan. 6 she switches to the songs of Cole Porter.

BARBÈS
376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-965-9177)—Finding something to say that Metheney, Scofield, and Frisell haven't already expressed is the unenviable task faced by post-boomer jazz guitarists. **Ben Monder** (here Jan. 2), a noted new-jazz player since the eighties, faces the challenge head on. Jan. 4: **Jenny Scheinman's** violin appears on Norah Jones's hit record, "Come Away with Me," and on Bill Frisell's acclaimed release "Intercontinentals." On her own, this talented composer and performer takes on an even larger chunk of the world's music.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Dec. 31: A throwback to the good old days when shouting the blues was as pertinent to jazz singing as purring a ballad, **Kevin Mahogany** has as much in common with the current crop of pseudo-Sinatras as Joe Turner did with Eddie Fisher.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—When **Curtis Stigers** went from singing pop to singing jazz a few years back, it all seemed a bit cock-

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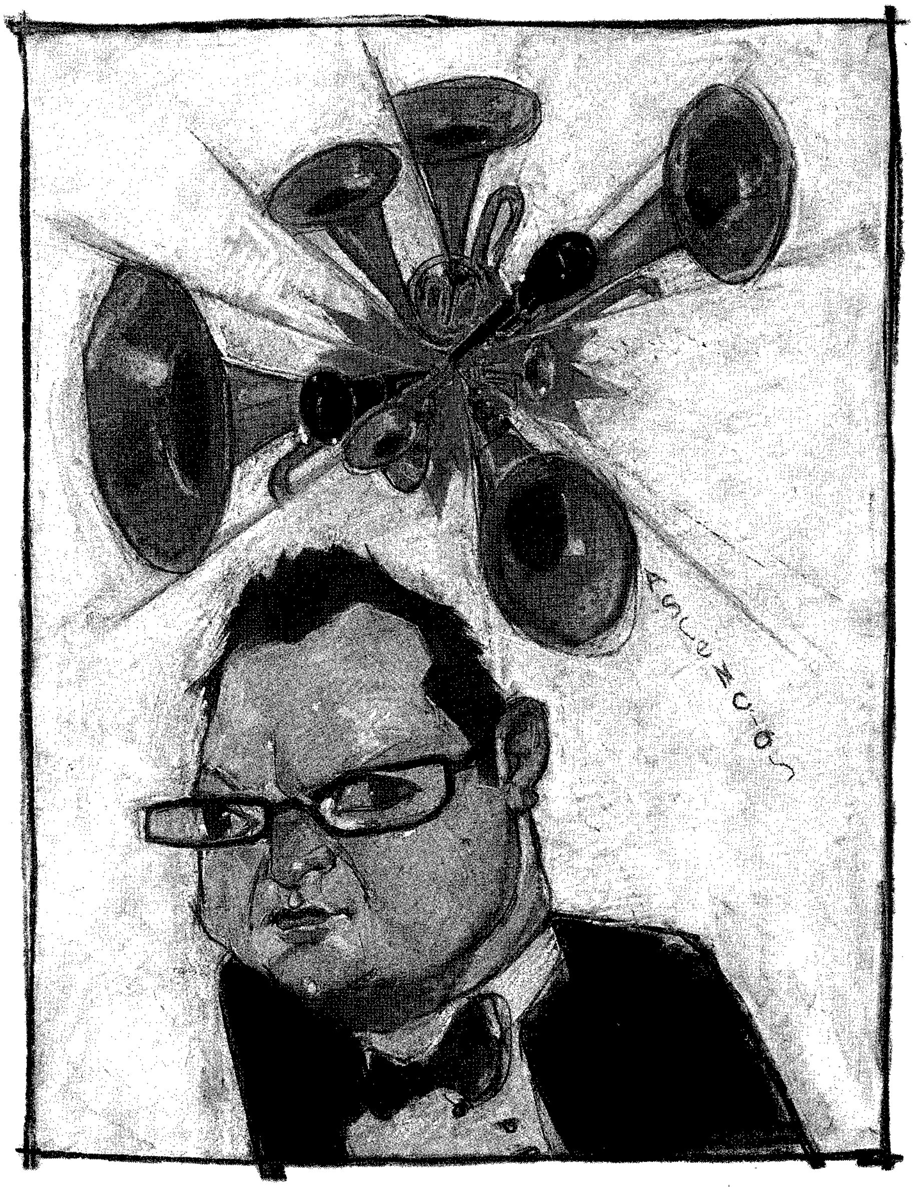

The Philharmonic plays Mark-Anthony Turnage's "A Quick Blast" on January 2-3.

N. ASCENCIOS

eyed. Now that a mass of classic-rock mainstays have recently turned to standards, it seems that Stigers, a pleasant-enough stylist who also plays agreeable sax, was ahead of the curve. He shares the bill on Dec. 31 with **Herbie Hancock,** who's here through Jan. 4. Aside from Bill Evans, most of the influential jazz pianists of the post-bop era are still with us, and are playing in peak form. Few have been as significant as Hancock, whose periodic returns to acoustic jazz are always welcome. The ageless virtuoso brings in a quartet featuring the saxophonist **Gary Thomas,** the bassist **Scott Colley,** and the drummer **Terri Lynne Carrington.**

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound murals, and, through Dec. 31, **Bobby Short.**

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Dec. 31: As ecumenical as he is enthusiastic, **Michael Feinstein** completes his annual Great American Holiday Songbook program.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Through Jan. 4: The **McCoy Tyner** trio. Tyner, a piano giant capable of keeping the young guns honest and in line, is joined by a few A-list guests, including the vibraphone pioneer **Bobby Hutcherson** and the saxophonists **Joe Lovano** (Dec. 30-Jan. 1) and **Michael Brecker** (Jan. 2-4). Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—**Cyrus Chestnut's** piano playing stirs together bop, blues, and gospel. He's usually heard with a trio, but on Dec. 31 he welcomes two horn players into the fold—the trombonist **Wess Anderson** and the trumpeter **Marcus Printup.** Jan. 2: **Frank Foster** and his **Swing Plus Band.** This accomplished tenor saxophonist, composer, arranger, and bandleader may never completely shake his decades-long association with Count Basie, but he has since established himself as an individualist skilled at joining together swing and modern jazz. Jan. 3-4: The **Jimmy McGriff** quartet. The first generation of Jimmy Smith's keyboard progeny is rapidly thinning, but McGriff is still with us. Dining.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Dec. 31: **Eartha Kitt** rings in the New Year with a program of her signature songs. At seventy-six, the nightclub singer and actress retains her sexy flair, and after a decade of work at the Café Carlyle she knows how to handle a New Year's Eve crowd. "They're there to have fun," she says. "But you don't want them to get too exhilarated."

SWEET RHYTHM
88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (212-255-3626)—Dec. 31 and Jan. 2-3: The fusion guitarist **Hiram Bullock's** latest album, "Try Livin' It," may spotlight his voice as much as his instrumental talents, but that doesn't mean that this former member of Letterman's house band has cut back on any of his signature fancy fretwork.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Through Jan. 4: The Cuban keyboardist **Chucho Valdes,** who slips into town just long enough to terrify the jazz-piano community, gets to work with a rhythm section featuring two popular younger players—the bassist **John Benitez** and the drummer **Dafnis Prieto**—and the veteran conga maestro **Ray Mantilla.** The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—A combination axe and pistol, made in 1580 from German steel gilded with gold, looks both too beautiful and too arcane to use. The same might be said for an embossed-steel horse's "head-defense" from thirteenth-century Tibet, or an Edo-period torso protector consisting of bear fur, iron, and lacquered leather. But all three trophies, like most of the pieces in **"Arms and Armor: Notable Acquisitions, 1991-2002,"** have seen battle. The Met's beloved Arms and Armor galleries were renovated in 1991, and subsequent acquisitions are highlighted in this little show, which emphasizes the expanded Asian holdings. Through Jan. 18. ♦ What does a widower do when his daughters elope with the family's chauffeur and electrician? Grenville L. Winthrop turned to collecting, amassing more than four thousand objects that he later donated to his alma mater. But, despite the fact that the collection was assembled practically across the street from the Met, this is its first New York viewing. Winthrop was partial to classic French painting, and **"A Private Passion: Nineteenth-Century Paintings and Drawings from the Grenville L. Winthrop Collection, Harvard University"** includes a stunning David portrait of Emperor Napoleon I, a virtually photographic Prud'hon, "Study of a Seated Man," and the rich-hued "Odalisque and Slave," by Ingres. Most enchanting, though, are the "reductions" from Rodin's "Burghers of Calais," which look modern in context. Through Jan. 25. ♦ You wouldn't expect to find a subversive agenda in **"Crossing the Channel: British and French Painting in the Age of Romanticism,"** but there is one: proving that the English and French did get along, Waterloo notwithstanding. Examples of artistic cross-influence are on display throughout the galleries: Bonnington trying Corot-style plein-air painting; Paul Huet copying Constable; Delacroix taking inspiration from Shakespeare, Byron, and Scott and even trying his hand at watercolors, which French critics considered a ridiculous "English medium." The large-scale copy of Géricault's "Raft of the Medusa" at the exhibition's entrance is a bit puzzling (the original never leaves the Louvre), but his famous "Monomania" portraits—which could be up-to-date takes on neurotic New Yorkers—are not to be missed. Through Jan. 4. ♦ Two retrospectives, of the works of Philip Guston and El Greco. Through Jan. 4 and Jan. 11, respectively. ♦ **"Bravehearts: Men in Skirts"** looks at the many cultures in which men wear skirts and the various uniformly unsuccessful attempts of fashion designers to add the item to the wardrobes of the men in this culture. Through Feb. 8. ♦ **"Treasures of a Lost Art: Italian Manuscript Painting of the Middle Ages and Renaissance."** Through Feb. 1. ♦ **"The Dawn of Photography: French Daguerreotypes, 1839-1855."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Dreams of Yellow Mountain: Landscapes of Survival in Seventeenth-Century China."** Through Jan. 25. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA QNS)
33rd St. at Queens Blvd., Long Island City (212-708-9400)—For **"Artist's Choice: Mona Hatoum, Here Is Elsewhere,"** the Palestinian and British artist chooses works from the museum's permanent collection, including examples by Cindy Sherman, Robert Gober, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and

Francis Alÿs. Through Feb. 2. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 10 to 5, and Friday evenings until 7:45.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"James Rosenquist"** is a pinball machine of a retrospective, gracing the museum's ramp with two-dimensional equivalents of rackety lights and bumpers. The early Pop work, which uses billboard-painting techniques to create surrealistic montages of slightly outdated magazine imagery, feels immortal. It nails a recurrent concern of modernity: the rolling blind spot of the recent past. Bigger, slicker later paintings succumb to mere razzmatazz. But Rosenquist earns blanket forgiveness on the strength of his classic "F-111" (1964-65), a multi-panelled wraparound work, eighty-six feet long, that distills the madnesses of the nineteen-sixties with supple, violent majesty. Through Jan. 25. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—It was easy to predict that **"Arshile Gorky: A Retrospective of Drawings"** would be a ravishing show, but it was harder to foresee how powerfully it would argue for Gorky as the most gifted of all American artists. Right from the start, in the early nineteen-twenties, until the exceedingly bitter end, in the year of his suicide, 1948, Gorky was a draftsman of unequalled, at times almost unbearable sensitivity. Whether he's working in pencil, ink, charcoal, pastel, or crayon, form melts and jells in shallow, tactile depth at his sensuous touch. Lines are like exposed nerves, colors like inflammations. Nearly every picture burns with intelligent, vulnerable life. Through Feb. 15. ♦ The sparkling mid-career painting retrospective **"John Currin"** will be this season's major conversation piece. Topic: how have super-old-fashioned, alternately academic- and schlocky-looking figure paintings become the bee's knees in contemporary art? Currin's mostly imagined winsome nudes, pathetic males, society dames, gay couples, and, oh yes, women with breasts as big as the Ritz make everybody nervous in one way or another. They also display phenomenal degrees of skill and subtleties of expression. Once you start looking at Currin's stuff, it's all you can do to stop. Through Feb. 22. ♦ **"Unrepentant Ego: The Self-Portraits of Lucas Samaras."** Through Feb. 8. (Open Wednesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—Contemporary Murrano Jews in Portugal celebrating holidays in hiding; Argentinean mothers of the disappeared; Purim masqueraders in China and Africa; large family groups from Ethiopia, Yemen, India, Venezuela, and Hong Kong; denizens of Birobidzhan, the Jewish Autonomous Region, established by Stalin in 1934; Jewish hawkers of Catholic souvenirs outside St. Peter's, where hereditary licenses go back to the eighteenth century; female rabbinical students in New York City; boys from the Hebrew Academy of Las Vegas—the Diaspora includes them all, and **"The Jewish Journey: Frédéric Brenner's Photographic Odyssey"** presents their portraits in crisply documentarian black-and-white. Through Jan. 11. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

DIA CENTER FOR THE ARTS
548 W. 22nd St. (212-989-5566)—Pierre Huyghe may be Parisian, but he takes a Hollywood approach. He delivers spectacular entertainment with an emphasis on childlike awe (Spielberg looms large, as the close encounters of his recent show at the Guggenheim revealed). Here sections of wall slide along tracks to create a room within the gallery. When the walls meet, a film screens; when it ends, the walls roll away. Onscreen, woodland creatures romp in trees behind tract houses. Costumed children—bunnies, owls, and cardboard boxes—eat rainbow-colored doughnuts. A giant balloon stands in for the moon as day turns to night. The non-narrative style is sweet but aimless, like Huyghe's imagined audience, which asks nothing more of art than it does of the movies: to sit passively back and enjoy the show. Through Jan. 11. ♦ The strange career of Jorge Pardo, the Cuban-born design virtuoso and the art world's doyen of decorative chic, now includes architecture. Skeletal pavilions of thick, eccentrically jigsawed, pale birch plywood are Gehry-esque feats pulled off with computer-generated components, most of them unique; they're screwed together to form undulant, vaulted, delightful spaces. Based on the evidence here, Pardo's design system is elegant child's play. Through Jan. 11. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

TABLES FOR TWO

UNCLE JACK'S STEAKHOUSE
39-40 Bell Blvd., Bayside, Queens (718-229-1100)—This chummy restaurant, which has been open only since 1996, cultivates the atmosphere of a venerable New York institution—mahogany bar, pressed-copper ceiling, Sinatra on the sound system, velvety nineteen-twenties-speakeasy décor. (A nearly identical Manhattan branch has just opened at Thirty-fourth and Ninth.) The menu is pleasingly classic, presented on gilt-framed chalkboards and explained by optimistic tuxedo-wearing captains who know the answers to questions like "How much surf and turf *can* two New York Jets players consume?" For appetizers, there are lamb-chop "popsicles," sprinkled with bread crumbs, garlic, and rosemary and melting off the bone; bluepoint oysters; nostalgic shrimp cocktail; and a deliciously yielding Buffalini mozzarella in a balsamic reduction sauce.

You might be full already, but you'll have to persevere. (Most diners go home with a bag of leftovers.) Porterhouse for two is the specialty, but there's also the "Flintstone chop"—prime rib with a long bone and a hunk of meat on the end; ruby-red filet mignon, presented with a sprig of rosemary; and sake-massaged Kobe beef. All the meat is cooked perfectly, the char exactly even on both sides. (The one poultry offering is listed under Eclectic Dishes.) For dessert, try the New York cheesecake, which a diner described as "old school"—very dense.

One recent night, a blonde wearing a glittery reindeer pin sang "Happy Birthday" to her friend, then spilled a drink on her. "You wasted a good 'buca! Whatsa matter with you?" she snapped. At the end of the bar, a slim gentleman nursed a cocktail as he sat beside a mausoleum-like humidor with individual drawers for rent. "Two thousand bucks a year," he said. The drawers had brass nameplates. Rudolph Giuliani. The Greek. The New York Times. Beepandcell.com. Mayor Bloomberg, whose framed photo, like Giuliani's, is on the wall, doesn't have a personal humidor. He is, of course, the reason that Giuliani now must step outside for his after-dinner smoke. (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner; weekends for dinner. Entrées $24-$150.)

—*Dana Goodyear*

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—Dara Birnbaum's digital video installation, **"Erwartung/ Expectancy,"** begins with the projected words "Pitch dark. A broad path. Tall trees close together." The music is Schoenberg's 1904 composition "Erwartung"; the language comes from Marie Pappenheim's libretto. The multi-panel projection leads the viewer into a filmic evocation of nightmarishly shadowed woods, with sampled bits of the original score set against brooding images of a young woman in a white dress. She is, one assumes, the spirit of both the music and of Pappenheim, Schoenberg's muse and collaborator. But the hypnotic soundtrack is considerably more effective than the angsty scenery. Through Jan. 4. ♦ When Magdalena Carmen Frieda Kahlo y

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THIS WEEK'S
WEB EXCLUSIVE:

LOUIS MENAND TALKS ABOUT
TELEVISION, THE PRESIDENCY,
AND THE ROLE OF ARTIFICE
IN NATIONAL POLITICS

PLUS:
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Jon Lee Anderson
Joan Acocella
Judith Thurman
Ken Auletta
Edna O'Brien
Maira Kalman
and more

AND: A calendar of *New Yorker* events across the country

Calderón was a child in the suburbs of Mexico City, her German Jewish father pulled her out of the convent her Spanish and Indian mother had chosen and sent her to a German school. Years later, when Kahlo learned that her alma mater had begun distributing Nazi-produced genealogical charts and encouraging the *kinder* to document their racial purity, she put her concern into her work, using the same three-generation family tree to document her own mestiza and Sephardic roots. This small, pointed exhibit, **"Frida Kahlo's Intimate Family Picture,"** investigates that image and a few others for covert symbols of her Jewish lineage. Through Jan. 4. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45; Thursdays, 11 to 8; and Fridays, 11 to 3.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—The Academy's début exhibition, in 1826, included women, which was remarkably advanced for the era. Shortly thereafter, its schools added members of the fairer sex to the student rolls and elected women as academicians. More than a hundred items from the museum's collection of the paintings, sculptures, and works on paper made by these students and members are on view in **"Challenging Tradition: Women of the Academy, 1826-2003,"** with examples ranging from Mary Cassatt to Helen Frankenthaler and Maya Lin. Unfortunately, the tang of innovation seems to have worn off—the gracious, wainscotted rooms are filled with a conspicuously well-bred group of portraits, landscapes, and geometric abstractions. The Academy's founding fathers could drink tea beside this art without a qualm. Through Jan. 4. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. (212-869-8089)—The exhaustive and often enchanting **"Russia Engages the World: 1453-1825"** is gorgeously situated: in low-lit, marble-walled rooms, liturgical chants and classical music play softly as illuminated manuscripts, silk imperial scrolls, burnished coins, and decorative engravings gleam. The artifacts of Russia's confrontation with the world testify to its peculiar destiny: to crush Western Europe's armies only to fall victim to Western Europe's ideas. Even after defeating the Swedes, in 1709, Peter the Great raised a glass to his foes and military "teachers," and by 1720, as decreed by the General Regulation on display, Swedes were supervising Russia's nascent bureaucracy. The Russians marched into Paris in 1815 as victors as well, but it was French notions of liberty and justice that convulsed Russia and brought down the monarchy a hundred years later. Through Jan. 31. ♦ Artist's books recently acquired by the Library's Rare Books Division are presented in **"Ninety from the Nineties: A Decade of Printing,"** which groups adventurous examples of the book-as-art-object under rubrics like "Type," "Binding," "Paper," "Illustration," and a wild-card category called "Inspiration." There are etchings and wood-block prints, watermarks and handmade papers, typographical experiments and ingeniously folded, die-cut, and pop-up shapes. As far as contents go, poetry predominates, from Petrarch to Walt Whitman. And then there's the set of mini-books, by Julie Chen; she calls them bon bon mots and has them packed up in a candy-box-like slipcase. Through May 28. (Open Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 7:30, and Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Black Belt"** seems to have been inspired by the confrontation in the 1978 kung-fu film "Game of Death" between the lithe and lethal but physically small Bruce Lee and his towering, bearded opponent, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, with sunglasses and Afro. Twenty-two artists draw a variety of lessons from the epochal encounter in this homage to chopsocky flicks, blaxploitation soundtracks, and funky outfits. Standouts include Louis Gispert's walk-in stereo speaker, short animated films by Ellen Gallagher and Edgar Cleijne, and Rico Gatson's multi-screen homage linking such heroes as Lee and Jabbar to Martin Luther King, Jr., and Public Enemy. Through Jan. 4. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6; Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

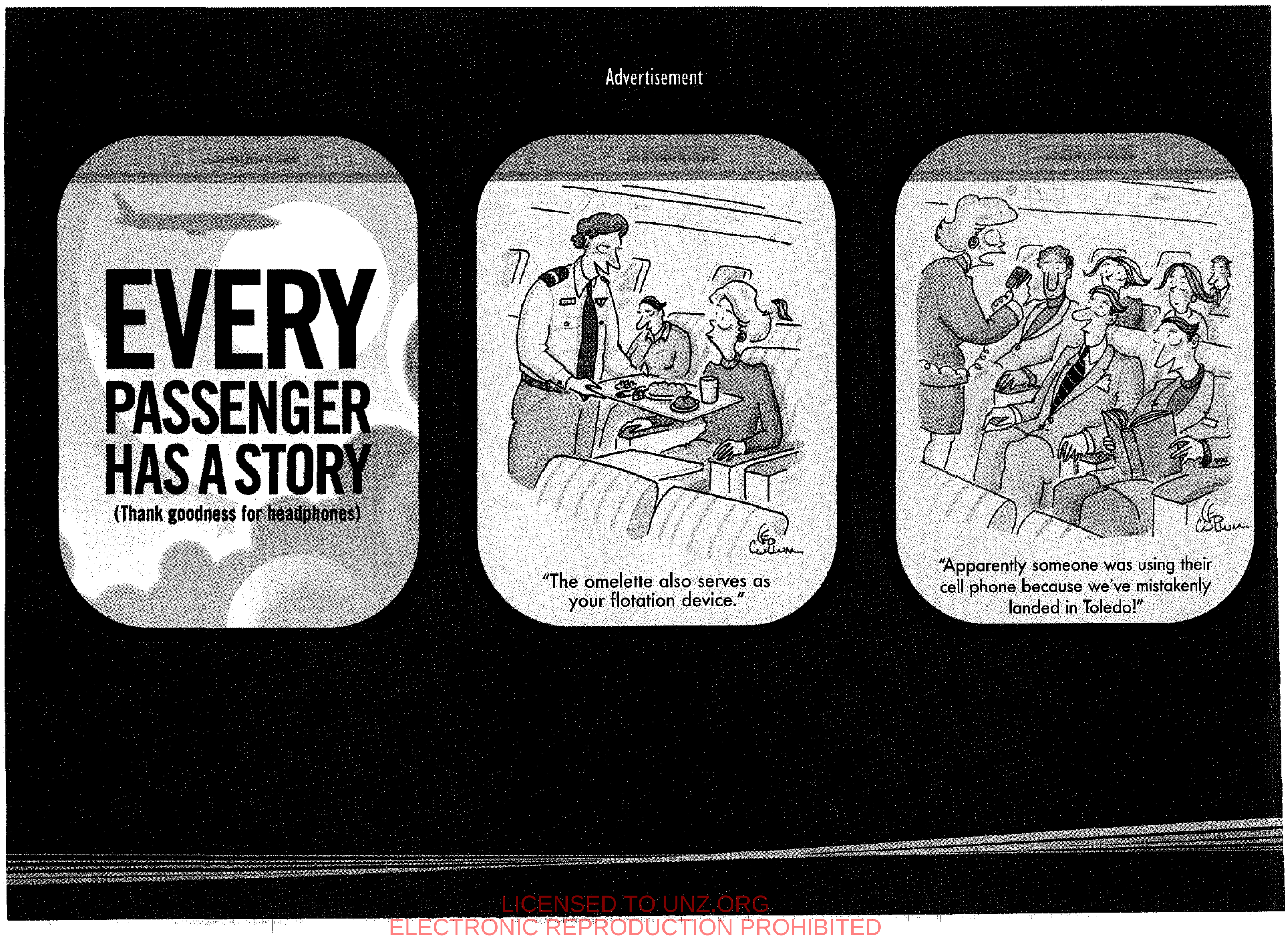
GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

GEORG BASELITZ
A suite of ten recent paintings by the neo-expressionist draws upon a personal iconography with Germanic overtones. Eagles, twisted pine trees, and snowcapped Alps predominate, rendered with thin, brushy gestures in hot reds and purples. The imagery, with its mixture of merriment and menace, derives from paintings Baselitz made as a teenager in the fifties—relevant dates are blazoned across the snowy peaks like captions shouted out by God. There's a pleasing brightness to the palette, but ultimately all this nostalgic fire and ice feels both slight and self-conscious. Through Feb. 7. (Michael Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623.)

VICTOR BRAUNER
This largely unknown Surrealist has an impeccable claim to the title: he made exquisite-corpse drawings with artists like Yves Tanguy and Raoul Ubac, and he showed up in those annual Surrealist class photos—but his name was left out at the printer's and had to be handwritten in later. This survey includes glossy panel paintings from the thirties and forties that feature hollow-eyed spectres, half-human beasts, and Daliesque constructions, and works from the fifties, colorful figures on wood that conjure up Klee. Through Jan. 17. (Ubu, 416 E. 59th St. 212-534-4444.)

Advertisement



EVERY
PASSENGER
HAS A STORY
(Thank goodness for headphones)
"The omelette also serves as your flotation device."
"Apparently someone was using their cell phone because we've mistakenly landed in Toledo!"

TONY CRAGG
A majestic array of large new abstract sculptures in bronze, wood, fibreglass, and other materials by the English master who now lives in Wuppertal, Germany. In one kind of work, totems of woozy seemingly lathe-turned shapes yield a phantasmagoria of faces in profile when you walk around them. In another sort, mechanical-looking elements seem to evolve into voracious organisms. The seductive surfaces—humble, lovely, molten-looking tin coats one bronze—temper the aggressive form. Cragg's repertoire of effects includes a sort of ecstatic, upside-down gravity, à la El Greco, in heavy pieces that appear to pour skyward. Through Jan. 17. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.)

"ASSEMBLAGE"
The items don't sound like classics: a pair of miniature French doors painted black, some dead typewriters, a group of battered baby dolls, a road sign wrapped in burlap, some bits of cardboard, wire, and string. But this show of assemblages hits the high points of the genre, with examples by Marcel Duchamp, Dieter Roth, Edward Kienholz, Christo, and Richard Tuttle. The show covers the development of the form, from Kurt Schwitters' "Merzbild Rossfett," from 1918, to Jason Rhoades' "Deer Dressed as a Horse, Dressed as a Sheep," from 1993, but it focusses on the heyday of the form in the late fifties and early sixties, and includes works by Arman, Bruce Conner, Jean Tinguely, and many others. There are two refreshing omissions: Picasso, who's credited with inventing the genre, and Rauschenberg, its most famous practitioner. Through Jan. 31. (Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677.)

Short List

KIM SOOJA
The Project, 37 W. 57th St. 212-688-4673. Through Dec. 20.

GALLERIES-CHELSEA

RITA ACKERMANN
The artist celebrates pagan ritual. Witches (as in Wiccan, not wicked) congregate in the forest, a sprite skips through a mountain pass, and, in "Shaman," a wolf licks a baby's face under the watchful gaze of a naked woman in a top hat. Ackerman has made a few meditations that are more mundane, but even these carry intimations of the supernatural or surreal. The "Pianist" is a dreamy girl who stares at her reflection in the instrument's lacquered surface; in "Lina," a pockmarked woman in a wheelchair is consoled by a younger woman; and "The Blind Sculptress" feels her way around a huge and somewhat Frankensteinian human head. Through Jan. 17. (Andrea Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000.)

JACK PIERSON
The central assemblage in Pierson's new show is called "A Vignette Contrived of Various Objects Depicting the Artist in His Fortieth Year," and it includes, among other tchotchkes, a David Hockney etching, the "Physician's Desk Reference," a classical bust draped in a surfer's pukka-shell necklace, and a busted carousel horse sprawled on a divan. It's Oscar Wilde gone to Miami Beach: gaudy, breezy, and snarkily sentimental. Through Jan. 3. (Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727.)

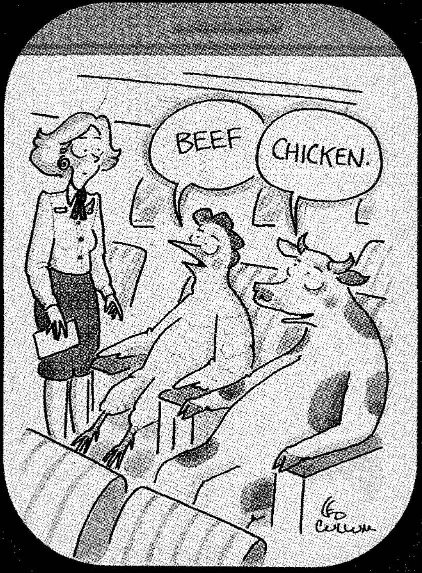
GREGOR SCHNEIDER
Before the galleries came, outer Chelsea was the taxi-garage district; still is, in parts. So it's easy for passersby to get confused when, walking down West Twenty-fourth Street between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues, they notice an alleylike space right next to the Barbara Gladstone gallery: a narrow, oil-stained lair lit by a lone bare bulb, screened from the street by a roll-down metal gate. The gate's half open, but there's nothing inside but a dirty sidewalk, a storm drain, and a scuffed curb. Such bleak verisimilitude is Gregor Schneider's trademark, and the young German artist's fabrication is a tour de force of nondescriptness. Through Dec. 31. (Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300.)

SEAN SCULLY
The many tourist postcards and posters featuring "Doors of Ireland" (or Holland, Italy, or Nantucket) might render the familiar subject off limits for many artists. But the prints and photos by this Irish artist find life in it. His studies, which he originally treated as an aide-mémoire, examine the scuffed and scratched character of doors and could easily serve as models for abstract paintings. Scully turned his photo series "Ten Siena Doors" into one of the fuzzy checkerboard prints seen here. Elsewhere, doors from Mexico, Morocco, and Spain turn into dusky-hued geometries. Through Jan. 10. (Alexander and Bonin, 132 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 212-367-7474.)

GALLERIES-DOWNTOWN

RUDOLF DE CRIGNIS
The monochromes here were built up with sixty to seventy layers of translucent color. In the blue ones, only the top coat is blue (ultramarine, to be precise), and the gray canvases include no black at all, just layers of colored pigment (old-Holland bright green, Scheveningen orange, cobalt blue) topped off with zinc white. The accumulated layers, applied methodically with intermittent vertical and horizontal strokes, create a subtle weave that is only visible up close. Color theory never seemed so devious and fun. Through Jan. 31. (Peter Blum, 99 Wooster St. 212-343-0441.)

LOIS DODD
Dodd's landscapes—leafless trees, building posts, hillcrests—are linear and skeletal. The mundane subjects can make them seem like snapshots, but they're full of casual significance, from the yard



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full of hens in "Terri's Chickens" to the cropped "Park View Along the Delaware." The concurrent show of nudes downtown makes a startling connection, crossing Picasso's monumental classicism of the twenties with the suddenly fashionable practice of yoga: "Nude in Yoga Position" looks like a post-Cubist Picasso figure at a Bikram yoga class. Both shows through Jan. 17. (Alexandre, 41 E. 57th St., 212-755-2828; and New York Studio School, 8 W. 8th St. 212-673-6466.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

ELLIOT ERWITT
A retrospective show of more than fifty years' worth of Erwitt's trenchant and giddy images, from around the world. Photographs of the segregated South, Nixon poking his finger at Khrushchev's chest, and Jackie Kennedy at J.F.K.'s funeral hang beside pictures of lovers dancing in a kitchen, little dogs standing next to their master's big feet, and a nudist on a beach, wearing dark shoes and socks. Through Jan. 3. (Leica, 670 Broadway. 212-777-3051.)

LYNN GEESAMAN
In these painterly color prints of gardens in Europe and North America, the greens in the trees' leaves seem to drip down into the grass and hedges, and flowers pop from their beds. Geesaman has an unerring eye for the geometric compositions of such famous horticultural achievements as the Parc de Sceaux, near Paris. Through Jan. 31. (Yancey Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610.)

KENRO IZU
Ghosts—of long-gone artisans and priests, as well as of the millions of people murdered by the Khmer Rouge—haunt Izu's hushed, elegant photographs of Angkor Wat. The sepia-tinted platinum prints are sombre but never morbid; they're remarkable for their quiet composure. The most memorable of the pictures here focus on details: a bas-relief of an inscrutable, smiling face, its nose crumbled away; a heavily carved doorway smothered by a heap of pleated tree roots. Many of the images are offhandedly splendid—in one wide shot, the whole of a temple is echoed in a lake that also reflects clouds, so that the entire structure appears to be part of a dream. Through Jan. 17. (Sepia, 148 W. 24th St. 212-645-9444.)

ROCKY SCHENK
Signs float above people's heads, and stairways twirl down from nowhere toward empty plazas in Schenk's dreamy black-and-white images. The photographs don't seem to be related to one another. A laughing woman holds a drink in what could be a stage set from a snappy thirties drawing-room comedy; a group of people stare at the sun's reflection over the sea. But shapes recur in prints that are toned to a golden perfection: winding forest paths, the arc of a waterfall's lip, a sidewalk that curves around a curved building. Through Jan. 17. (Bateman, 560 Broadway. 212-925-7951.)

Short List

GILLIAN WEARING
Gorney Bravin + Lee, 534 W. 26th St.
212-352-8372. Through Jan. 10.

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Susan Graham and Bo Skovhus lead the cast of this year's holiday special, **"The Merry Widow"**; Kirill Petrenko conducts. On New Year's Eve, a number of "surprise guest artists" will drop in during the Act III party scene, including one star from beyond the operatic firmament—Barbara Cook, who, in her first appearance at the Met, will offer some selections by Rodgers and Sondheim with her music director, Wally Harper. (Dec. 31 at 7:30 and Jan. 3 at 8.) ♦ In his first opera, the endlessly revised **"Benvenuto Cellini,"** Hector Berlioz chased the comic muse with such ardor and élan that he almost got things right. The director, Andrei Serban, gives short shrift to the opera's human passions, filling the gaps in the composer's sometimes stodgy pacing with a very busy corps de ballet. But his final, Brechtian flourish—an actor dressed as Berlioz swings in from the wings, proudly displaying his completed score—is a fitting touch for an opera that will always be a work in progress. The composer's strange, haunting melodies, bold rhythmic snaps, and incisive yet colorful orchestration should be well served by an ensemble cast that features Isabel Bayrakdarian, Katharine Goeldner, Jianyi Zhang (in the title role), Peter Coleman-Wright, and John Del Carlo; Derrick Inouye, in his Met début, conducts. (Jan. 1 at 8. This is the final performance.) ♦ None of Massenet's deftly fashioned melodramas can match his adaptation of Goethe's **"Werther"** for melodic richness or expressive power. In the company's première performance this season, Roberto Alagna (as Werther), Vesselina Kasarova, Lyubov Petrova, and the redoubtable Paul Plishka all appear in their roles for the first time at the house; Jacques Lacombe, the conductor, makes his Met début. (Jan. 2 and Jan. 6 at 8.) ♦ **"Il Barbiere di Siviglia"** returns with a glamorous bel-canto duo, Ruth Ann Swenson and Juan Diego Flórez, leading the cast; Bruno Campanella conducts. (Jan. 3 at 1:30.) ♦ The season première of **"Rigoletto,"** with Andrea Rost, Marina Domashenko, Frank Lopardo, Juan Pons, and Julian Konstantinov; Marco Armiliato. (Jan. 5 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

AMATO OPERA: "DIE FLEDERMAUS"
Anthony Amato directs and conducts a holiday run of Johann Strauss II's bubbly operetta, staged in the company's famously compact theatre on the Lower East Side. (319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 212-228-8200. A gala performance on Dec. 31 at 7; Jan. 3 at 7:30 and Jan. 4 at 2:30. Note: The company has extended its performances through Jan. 11.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Renée Fleming spends New Year's Eve with the orchestra and the conductor Andrew Davis, in music by Debussy, Ravel ("Shéhérazade"), Offenbach, Bizet (a suite from "Carmen"), and Massenet. (Dec. 31 at 8.) ♦ If the music of Mark-Anthony Turnage—a British boy-wonder type, now in his forties—continues to stand above that of most of his colleagues, it's due to the originality of his style: an arresting, if not always pleasant, amalgam of Viennese expressionism and electric jazz à la Miles Davis and John Scofield (his collaborator on a new evening-length work). Andrew Davis begins a pair of subscription performances with the American première of "A Quick Blast," a punchy overture for winds, brass, and percussion from 2001. The bulk of the program, however, belongs to Romantic works—Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto (with Joshua Bell) and the Sixth Symphony by Dvořák, a composer whom Davis has always held in high regard. (Jan. 2-3 at 8.) Note: Davis will also conduct the Dvořák on a Saturday-matinée program that begins with a performance of Brahms's Clarinet Quintet, played by musicians from the orchestra. ♦ Roberto Minczuk, the Philharmonic's associate conductor, leads a "rush-hour" concert of the Tchaikovsky concerto (along with Debussy's "Prélude à l'Après-Midi d'un Faune") on Dec. 6 at 6:45. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

"CANTATAS IN CONTEXT"
Mary Greer, an up-and-coming conductor and musicologist who worked with Christopher Hogwood at Boston's Handel and Haydn Society, leads the Orchestra of St. Luke's and the New York Baroque Soloists in the cantatas that make up Parts I-III of Bach's "Christmas Oratorio." The soloists include the soprano Mary Ellen Callahan, the tenor William Ferguson, and the baritone Christòpheren Nomura. (St. Bartholomew's Church, Park Ave. at 51st St. 212-378-0248. Jan. 4 at 3.)

RECITALS

BARGEMUSIC
Olga Bloom's floating chamber-music series is a year-round affair, but its cozy space, complete with fireplace—and at intermission, a groaning board of wine and cheese—is especially inviting at holiday time. She presents a gala evening of Bach for New Year's Eve, with the violinist Mark Peskanov joining a bunch of the city's hottest freelancers (including the flutist Susan Palma-Nidel and the cellist Edward Arron) for the Brandenburg Concertos Nos. 2, 4, and 5, among other works. (Dec. 31 at 7:30.) (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

SYMPATICA: "A BACH EXTRAVAGANZA"
Cobble Hill's own early-music group (with the recorder player Rachel Begley, the gambist Joëlle Morton, and the harpsichordist Jennifer Griesbach) celebrates the New Year with a Bach buffet that includes the Third English Suite, two instrumental sonatas, and several seasonally appropriate selections from the Schübler Chorales and the "Orgelbüchlein." (Christ Church Cobble Hill, Kane St. at Clinton St., Brooklyn. Jan. 1 at 2. A donation is suggested.)

JUPITER SYMPHONY CHAMBER PLAYERS
Weber's "Scottish Songs" and Schubert's "Shepherd on the Rock" and "Erlkönig" highlight a program offered by the Metropolitan Opera soprano Christine Goerke, the clarinettist Vadim Lando, and friends. (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. 212-799-1259. Jan. 5 at 2 and 7:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"FIRST SATURDAY"
The Brooklyn Museum of Art kicks off the New Year with a diverse program celebrating European art and culture. At the start of the evening, the theatrical troupe Dzieci transforms the museum's Beaux Arts court into a medieval square with its Festival of Fools, complete with folk dances, games, and a bit of magic. At 8, instructors from the Stepping Out Dance Studios offer waltz and polka lessons, and at 9 the annual Winter Ball gets under way with music by the Vienna Festival Orchestra. For those with two left feet, the evening also includes film screenings, curator talks, and a chance to view the museum's exhibit "About Time: 700 Years of European Painting." (Eastern Parkway. 718-638-5000. Jan. 3, from 6 to 11.)

MARATHON READINGS
Jan. 1, starting at 2: The Poetry Project's annual New Year's Day gathering includes appearances by Penny Arcade, Dael Orlandersmith, Eileen Myles, Lenny Kaye, and many other writers, musicians, dancers, and performers. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. For more information, call 212-674-0910.) ♦ Jan. 1, starting at 2: Luminaries from the downtown literary, music, and performing-arts crowds (including many of the same folks who are appearing at the Poetry Project) gather at the Bowery Poetry Club for a self-proclaimed "alternative New Year's Day spoken word/performance extravaganza." (308 Bowery, at Bleecker St. For more information, call 212-614-0505.)

MORE READINGS
Jan. 5 at 8: Jonathan Lethem, Colson Whitehead, and Eduardo Vega Yunqué read from their fiction and essays about New York City. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.) ♦ Jan. 6 at 7: Gabe Hudson offers selections from his short-story collection, "Dear Mr. President," and James McGrath Morris reads from "The Rose Man of Sing Sing," his account of the life of the newspaper editor Charles E. Chapin. (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.)

TALK
Jan. 6 at 11 A.M: Todd S. Purdum discusses his book "A Time of Our Choosing: America's War in Iraq." (Makor, 35 W. 67th St. 212-415-5500.)

MOVIES OPENING

MILLENNIUM MAMBO

Hou Hsiao Hsien ("Flowers of Shanghai") directed this drama about a love triangle involving a night-club hostess (Shu Qi), her live-in boyfriend, and a gangster. In Mandarin. Opening Dec. 31. (Cinema Village.)

FILM NOTES

THE BARBARIAN INVASIONS

Rémy (Rémy Girard), the plumply boisterous philanderer of Denys Arcand's 1986 film, "The Decline of the American Empire," is now in his early fifties and dying of cancer in a Quebec hospital. His investment-banker son, Sébastien (Stéphane Rousseau)—a svelte, devastatingly efficient young man who disapproves of his reprobate father—shows up from London, arranges for Rémy's comfort as best he can, and reassembles the gang of gabby intellectuals who were Rémy's friends and colleagues in the earlier movie. The hospital room becomes the site of an ongoing party: sexual memories, bawdy jokes, political tirades, and regrets bang off the walls at all hours. Eventually, the entire group relocates to a house on the same lake that was the setting for "Decline"; as Rémy grapples with his failures and satisfactions, the movie shuts up and calms down. Arcand's film might be called an idyll of death, and the concluding scenes, in which Rémy tries to pass something on to the next generation, are intensely moving. In French.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/24/03.) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

BIG FISH

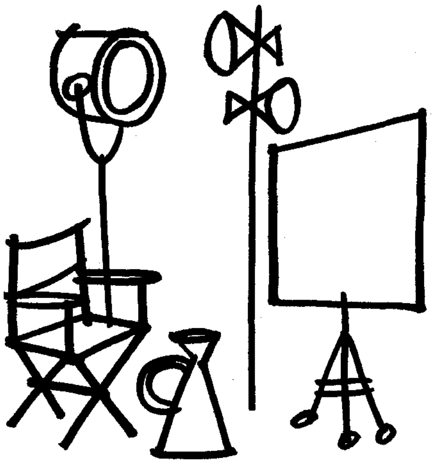
The title is apt enough; this movie is long, wet, and wriggling, and, after a while, you may want to hold your nose. It tells the story of Edward Bloom, played in his youth by Ewan McGregor and in the final act of his life by Albert Finney. That life is a picaresque, crammed with exaggeration and casual magic—a witch with a glass eye that shows forthcoming deaths, say, or a pair of spangled night-club singers who are also Siamese twins. This is easy stuff for somebody of the director Tim Burton's gifts, and you seldom feel that the new picture tests him or turns him on in the way that "Beetlejuice" or "Edward Scissorhands" did. The result is his most emotionally reactionary work to date. With Billy Crudup as Bloom's poor stooge of a son, Danny DeVito as a circus ringmaster, Matthew McGrory as a moping giant, and Jessica Lange and Alison Lohman, both badly underused, as the older and younger versions of the hero's only love.—*Anthony Lane* (12/15/03) (Empire 25, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

COLD MOUNTAIN

A heroic attempt to capture, in all its tangled bitterness, the backwash of war—the lawless, scrappy life that takes shape behind the lines in an atmosphere of uneasy freedom. Inman (Jude Law), a young Confederate soldier, badly wounded and spiritually depleted, deserts his company and tries to make his way back to his home town in North Carolina and to a young woman, Ada (Nicole Kidman), he knew briefly and fell in love with. Along the way, he has a series of grotesque, terrifying adventures. Ada, meanwhile, aided by an arrogant interloper (Renée Zellweger) with a strong back, learns to run the farm that her late father left to her. The coming together of the two lovers has a satisfying kind of inevitability, like the halves of a drawbridge falling into place. Anthony Minghella adapted Charles Frazier's acclaimed 1997 novel, and directed in a style both high flown (the lovers' letters soar over the tormented landscapes like a blessing) and filthy with the mire and blood of war. The extraordinary cast includes Donald Sutherland, Eileen Atkins, Brendan Gleeson, Philip Seymour Hoffman, and Giovanni Ribisi.—*D.D.* (12/22 & 29/03) (Lincoln Square and Union Square.)

DIAL M FOR MURDER

Those who like drawing-room murder and cold, literate, gentlemanly skulduggery will find this ingenious and almost entertaining. Ray Milland is the suitably suave husband who hires unsavory, penny-dreadful Anthony Dawson to kill his rich, unfaithful wife, Grace Kelly; he then calmly goes out for the evening with her lover, Robert Cummings. The unexpected happens: the wife dispatches her would-be assassin with scissors, so the determined husband goes to work to make the murder look premeditated. All this is related with Alfred Hitchcock's ghoulish chic, but everyone in this 1954 film seems to be walking around with tired blood. Amusingly, John Williams, as the inspector who unravels the case, is so wryly, archly dexterous that he makes everybody else's underplaying look positively boisterous. (A mystery darker than any propounded in the film: why did Hitchcock persist in using actors as unattractively untalented as Robert Cummings?) Grace Kelly is very beautiful here, in a special, pampered way.—*Pauline Kael* (Film Forum; Jan. 2-6.)



ELF

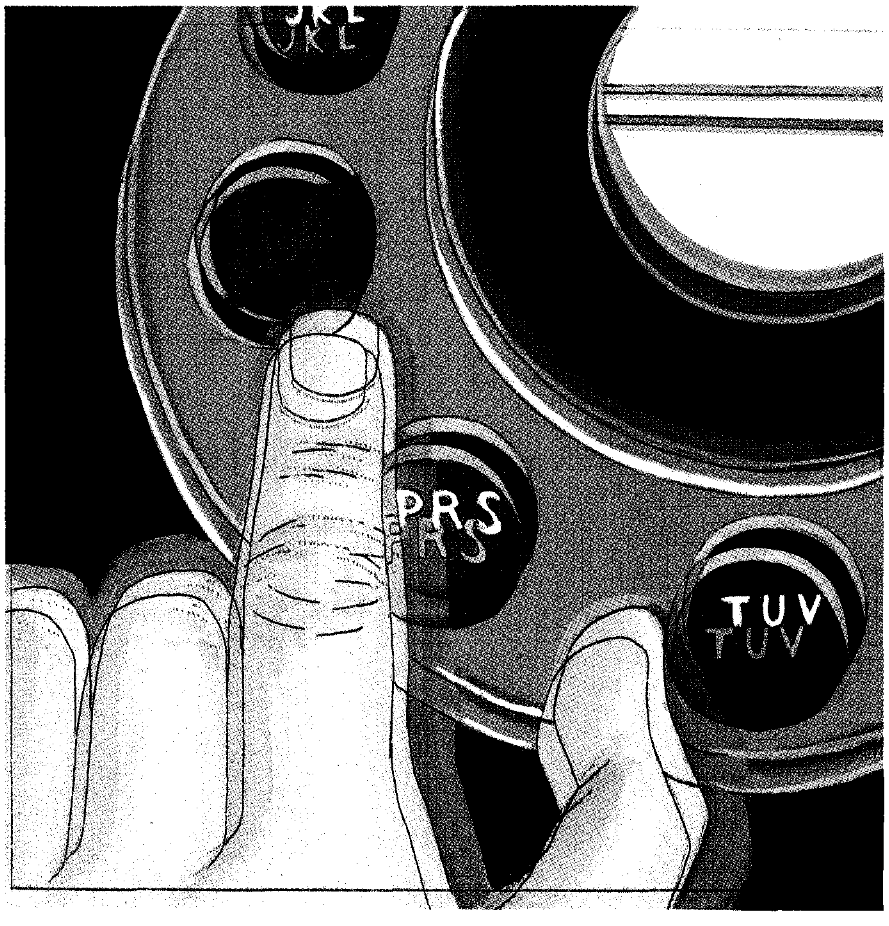
Will Ferrell with training wheels. The comedian gives a funny, half-throttle performance as Buddy, a human raised by the elves at the North Pole. This good-spirited holiday comedy was directed by Jon Favreau, with plenty of homages to Christmas movies past.—*Michael Agger* (Battery Park 16, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and 19th Street East 6.)

GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING

A slow, attentive movie about a painter and his model demands the kind of patience that moviegoers, especially in this hectic season, may feel reluctant to supply. But Peter Webber's reworking of Tracy Chevalier's novel is worth staying with: it casts a heavy spell as it unfolds the tale of Griet (Scarlett Johansson), a maid newly arrived in the house of Johannes Vermeer (Colin Firth). The year is 1665, and the period reconstruction, for those who are aroused by such things, is—apart from a few modern lines of dialogue—formidably detailed. The danger with such beautifying efforts is that cinema will turn into a branch of taxidermy, and what keeps Webber's movie alive is the tenseness of the setup (will this girl stay in the artist's household, and, if so, will she become his lover or his muse?), and, above all, the presence of Johansson. She is often wordless and close to plain onscreen, but wait for the ardor with which she can summon a closeup and bloom under its gaze; this is her film, not Vermeer's, all the way.—*A.L.* (12/15/03) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

IN AMERICA

The tale of an Irish family that travels to New York in search of a better life, or, at any rate, a life. Johnny (Paddy Considine), his wife, Sarah (Samantha Morton), and their daughters, Christy (Sarah Bolger) and Ariel (Emma Bolger), settle near Hell's Kitchen and wrestle, as you would expect, with outlandish local customs such as air-conditioners and Halloween. Despite the title, the director, Jim Sheridan, is gripped less by the country in which his characters find themselves than by their own hope and anguish: there was a third child, a boy, who died before they came to the



At Film Forum, the 3-D version of Alfred Hitchcock's "Dial M for Murder."

LARA TOMLIN

States. The movie has a busy intensity but lacks the rooted confidence of Sheridan's Irish work, as seen in "My Left Foot" and "In the Name of the Father." What ties it down, if anything, is the performance of Sarah Bolger—ten years old when the picture was made, but the sanest and saddest person on the block.—*A.L.* (12/1/03) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

THE LAST SAMURAI

Tom Cruise is Nathan Algren, a disillusioned Civil War hero, who goes to Japan in 1876 and trains the Emperor's army in modern warfare. In their first encounter with the great samurai Lord Katsumoto (Ken Watanabe), the gun-toting soldiers are overwhelmed and Algren is carted off to Katsumoto's mountain retreat, where the two warriors have dignified conversations about loyalty and cherry blossoms and other profound Japanese things. Redeemed by discipline and honor, Algren trains as a samurai and, in the end, fights alongside the great man. The director, Edward Zwick, attempting to revive the stately manner of sixties epics, has made a very earnest piece of work—handsome, methodical, pious, and rather doggedly literal. The training sequences are fun (Cruise gets knocked on his ass again and again), and the big battles are thrilling. Yet the naïve association of virtue with feudalism and the scene of Algren kneeling before the Emperor induce a certain amount of queasiness. With the beautiful ex-model Koyuki as Taka, the widow who takes care of Algren. From a story by John Logan, who worked with Zwick and Marshall Herskovitz on the stiff-jointed screenplay.—*D.D.* (12/8/03) (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, Village Theatre VII, and Ziegfeld.)

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Astor Plaza, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, 34th Street, and Union Square.)

MASTER AND COMMANDER: THE FAR SIDE OF THE WORLD

Finally, the work of Patrick O'Brian arrives onscreen. Two of his twenty Jack Aubrey novels have been requisitioned for this new Peter Weir film; instead of receiving a gentle introduction, we are launched straight into a fogbound firefight, and from there into a race around Cape Horn. The casting of Russell Crowe as Aubrey will divide the fans; he can handle the sway of action with aplomb, but O'Brian readers may flinch at his sullen air and pine for the bluffness of the original. Paul Bettany does a delicate job with the role of Stephen Maturin, Jack's best and cleverest friend; we sense his quiet eagerness—common to the work of Weir and O'Brian—to press on toward the darker reaches of the world and discover more. For all the foul weather, and despite the charming amputation scene, we feel ourselves to be in good company with these men, and strangely jealous of their packed and salted lives.—*A.L.* (11/17/03) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Twin, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

THE MISSING

Ron Howard gets down and dirty with a skillfully directed but rather sadistic Western about a vicious Apache *brujo* (Eric Schweig), or witch, who hangs rattlers in the trees, throws vile colored powders into people's mouths and eyes, and captures young white virgins whom he then sells as slaves to laughing Mexicans. No such trade existed in New Mexico in 1885, but Howard deals in such authentic trials as bullets removed from flesh and teeth pulling. Cate Blanchett is the tough frontier woman whose daughter (Evan Rachel Wood) is kidnapped by the Apaches, and Tommy Lee Jones plays Blanchett's muttering reprobate of a father, who long ago "went Injun" and understands their savage ways. The movie might be seen as a degraded version of the 1956 John Ford classic, "The Searchers."—*D.D.* (12/8/03) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

MONA LISA SMILE

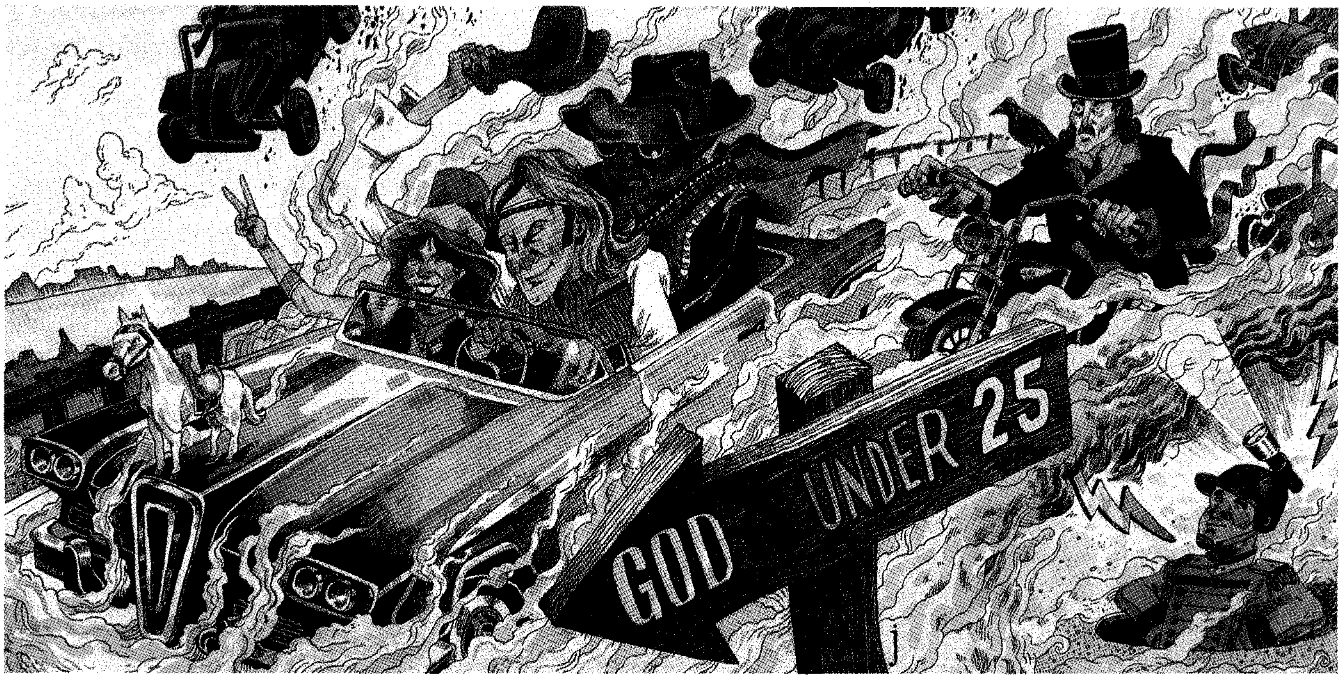
Intelligent, responsible, superfluous. Miss Katherine Watson (Julia Roberts), a bohemian, feminist art historian from California, shows up as an instructor at Wellesley in 1953, when the college is still an upper-class breeding ground for dutiful young wives. Stirring the place up, Katherine involves herself in the lives of her students—a bitch (Kirsten Dunst), a floozy (Maggie Gyllenhaal), and a superior brain determined to marry right away (Julia Stiles)—and has an affair with a sexy but untrustworthy Italian teacher (Dominic West). The fight against traditionalism has long been won, so the movie encourages the audience to congratulate itself on what it already believes. Yet Mike Newell's direction is solid, and the period décor and costumes are a solemn riot of chintz and pleated skirts.—*D.D.* (12/22 & 29/03) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

MY ARCHITECT

A traditional quest, superbly told. Nathaniel Kahn seeks to understand the life of his father, the architect Louis I. Kahn; his task is made even more difficult by the fact that Kahn had three separate and coexisting families: a wife and two mistresses with one child apiece. For his part, Nathaniel was an illegitimate son and only eleven when his father died; his interviews are laced with raw, uncut feeling for a man he never really knew. Throughout the documentary, he uses Kahn's buildings (beautifully photographed) as a kind of wedge into his father's motivations and personality. He discovers that Kahn's more famous contemporaries, like I. M. Pei, appear haunted by his career: is it better to have designed three or four unexampled buildings, as Kahn did, or to have had a successful, high-profile architectural practice? Perhaps more surprising, the women in Kahn's life don't regret the way he treated them. Anne Tyng, Kahn's co-worker and mistress, explains her affection this way: "The ideas that you work on together connect you always somehow." In the end, Nathaniel's homage to his father demonstrates what it was like to be caught in his creative whirlwind.—*M.A.* (Film Forum.)

SOMETHING'S GOTTA GIVE

Erica (Diane Keaton), a successful New York playwright and a woman who has been around the block a few times, is walking naked to her bathroom when a ladies' man named Harry (Jack Nicholson), a guest in Erica's house, stumbles upon her. How do these two veterans react to this



THE END IS WEIRD *Roger Corman's 1971 picture "Gas-sss" may be the most extreme example of the hippie end-of-the-world film. For starters, a gas kills everyone over the age of twenty-five, and then a group of conservative kids take over Texas. A stoner boy and a scientist girl flee to New Mexico in search of a fabled utopia. Along the way, Edgar Allan Poe and his raven show up to prophesy doom, and there are frequent voice-overs from God. As a coup de grâce, the final scene involves a vanload of actors wearing the masks of such sixties icons as Martin Luther King, Che Guevara, and Alfred E. Neumann. (Walter Reade Theatre; Jan. 3 and Jan. 5.)*

JOHN HENDRIX

unfortunate moment? Erica whoops, shrieks, and tries desperately to cover herself, while Harry throws up his hands as if to avoid an anthrax attack, shouts, "No! No!," and hurls himself against the nearest wall. What is the point of this hysteria? The writer-director Nancy Meyers appears eager to propitiate what she takes to be the national habit of youth worship. Harry and Erica do eventually hook up, but, for about half the movie, Meyers's embarrassment over sex between two sixty-year-olds makes the affair horribly self-conscious and less romantic than lewd—an "American Pie" for grownups. The picture does settle down, but the damage is done. And, while the upscale consumerist atmosphere of the movie is very knowing, there's very little genuine wit. With Amanda Peet, as Harry's original date, and a puppyish, treacly Keanu Reeves, as a young doctor who falls for Erica.—*D.D.* (12/22 & 29/03) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Twin, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

A STAR IS BORN

Judy Garland and James Mason are the leads (although she looks tired and worn, and he gives such a remarkable performance as the washed-up, decaying star that he brings a bloom to the movie) in this grandiose, emotionally charged musical version of the 1937 tearjerker. The updated version, released in 1954, is a terrible, fascinating orgy of self-pity and cynicism and mythmaking. Garland's jagged, tremulous performance is nakedly intense; her musical numbers include the capering "Born in a Trunk" and the dark, heavy torch song "The Man That Got Away." George Cukor directed, from Moss Hart's acerbic rewrite. George Hoyningen-Huené served as color consultant, and the strikingly sumptuous color design gives the film deep, neurotic, emotional tones.—*P.K.* (Moving Image; Jan. 3-4.)

THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE

A boy is given a bicycle. He grows up to compete, under the tutelage of his ferocious grandmother, in the Tour de France, only to be kidnapped and smuggled overseas. The old lady, with a panting hound in tow, tracks and retrieves the unfortunate cyclist, aided by three crones who feast on a casserole of murdered frogs. Such is the gritty, fantastic plot of Sylvain Chomet's animated film, which could only have emerged from a culture in which the worship of comic books approaches the status of an organized religion. Indeed, there is much to revere in Chomet's swollen caricatures and vertiginous angles, although agnostics may be tempted to point out that a little elastic surrealism goes a long way, and that to learn the exact details of somebody else's dreams—which is what this movie feels like—can be at once haunting and tiresome. In French, just about, though most of it is noise, and no subtitles are required.—*A.L.* (12/1/03) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.)

21 GRAMS

Impassioned and affecting as some of it is, this desperately sincere drama of life and death in Nowheresville, U.S.A., is also an arrogant failure. Benicio Del Toro, dolorously made up with clown circles under his eyes, plays the Jesus-freak ex-con who accidentally runs down a man and his two little girls. Sean Penn, some sort of math professor with a bad ticker, gets the heart of the dead man, at which point he begins to follow around the grieving widow (Naomi Watts). Written by Guillermo Arriaga and directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu, the same team responsible for the powerful "Amores Perros," the picture moves every which way but straight ahead. The intent of the scrambled syntax, one imagines, is to show how three sensitive and damaged people might encroach upon one another's lives, even infiltrate one another's unconscious, a process that works independently of time. But we don't know where we are in the story or why a given action should matter. The jagged pieces of the mosaic keep dropping off the wall and falling to the floor with a clatter. Yet the three stars act the hell out of their tormented roles, and, at times, they are amazing to watch.—*D.D.* (11/24/03) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

VERTIGO

It's as if you've never seen it before, because you've never "heard" it before. The restored prints of the ultimate cult movie—Hitchcock's voluptuous exploration of *l'amour fou*—present the original 1958 musical tracks in state-of-the-art sound that extracts previously hidden undertones and highlights from Bernard Herrmann's score. Of the composer's frequent collaborations with Hitchcock (including "Psycho"), this is the most complex and brilliant; he deploys everything from a habanera to a waltz macabre to illuminate the morbid romanticism at the movie's core. With soaring visual eloquence (a unique mixture of the mist-draped and the hard-edged), Hitchcock takes voyeurism and amorous fixation to audacious, almost necrophiliac lengths in this tale of a retired San Francisco police detective (James Stewart) investigating an old acquaintance's wife (Kim Novak). Despite its misshapen form and languor (Stewart crosses a hotel room in the time it took for him to race across London in "The Man Who Knew Too Much"), the movie is hypnotic and gloriously operatic—not a conventional masterpiece but an auteur's classic, flooded with the Master's erotic and moral obsessions.—*Michael Sragow* (Gramercy Theatre; Jan. 1 and Jan. 4.)

ALSO PLAYING

THE COMPANY

Paris.

THE COOLER

Angelika Film Center, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Lincoln Square.

THE FOG OF WAR

Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

THE HEBREW HAMMER

Angelika Film Center.

HOUSE OF SAND AND FOG

Lincoln Square.

MYSTIC RIVER (10/13/03)

Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, 64th and 2nd, Sutton 1 and 2, and Village Theatre VII.

TO BE AND TO HAVE (9/29/03)

Cinema Village.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 212-777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (212-924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (212-398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 66th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 139-143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Jan. 4: "Judy Garland's Classic Films." Dec. 31 at 2: "The Wizard of Oz" (1939, Victor Fleming). ♦ Jan. 1 at 2: "Meet Me in St. Louis" (1944, Vincente Minnelli). ♦ Jan. 2 at 2: "For Me and My Gal" (1942, Busby Berkeley). ♦ Jan. 3 at 1: "Easter Parade" (1948, Charles Walters). ♦ Jan. 3-4 at 3: "A Star Is Born" (†). ♦ Jan. 4 at 1: "The Pirate" (1948, Minnelli).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Dec. 31-Jan. 1 at 1:20, 3:20, 5:20, 7:20, and 9:20: A restored print of "Modern Times" (1936, Charles Chaplin). ♦ Jan. 2-6 at 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, and 9:50: The 3-D version of "Dial M for Murder" (†).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL

55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—"Filmmakers of Our Times," a feature film, followed by a documentary about the director. Jan. 6 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "Thérèse" (1986, Alain Cavalier; in French).

GRAMERCY THEATRE

127 E. 23rd St. (212-777-4900)—Through Feb. 29: "The Hidden God: Film and Faith." Jan. 1 at 2 and Jan. 4 at 4:15: "Vertigo" (†). ♦ Jan. 2 at 2: "Ways of Love" (1948, Roberto Rossellini; in Italian). ♦ Jan. 3 at 7: "The Green Ray" (1986, Eric Rohmer; in French). ♦ Through Jan. 22: "Das Neue Kino," German films. All films are in German. Jan. 1 at 6 and Jan. 4 at 2: "Circle of Deceit" (1981, Volker Schlöndorff). ♦ Jan. 2 at 4 and Jan. 3 at 5: "Men" (1985, Doris Dörrie). ♦ Jan. 5 at 8:15: "The Himmler Project" (2000, Romuald Karmakar). ♦ Through Jan. 18: A Victor Sjöström retrospective. Most films are silent, and some have Swedish intertitles, which will be translated simultaneously. Jan. 1 at 4:30 and Jan. 4 at 6:45: "His Lord's Will" (1919). ♦ Jan. 1 at 8:15: "Karin, Daughter of Ingmar" (1920). ♦ Jan. 2 at 6: "The Phantom Carriage" (1920). ♦ Jan. 2 at 8:15: "The Outlaw and His Wife" (1918). ♦ Jan. 3 at 1: "The Girl from the Marsh Croft" (1917). ♦ Jan. 3 at 3: "The Monastery of Sendomir" (1920). ♦ Jan. 3 at 9: "He Who Gets Slapped" (1924). ♦ Jan. 5 at 6: "A Man There Was" (1917) and "Name the Man" (1924).

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—Through Jan. 14: A Federico Fellini retrospective. All films are in Italian. Jan. 2 at 7 and Jan. 3 at 3: "Casanova" (1976). ♦ Jan. 3 at 7: "City of Women" (1980).

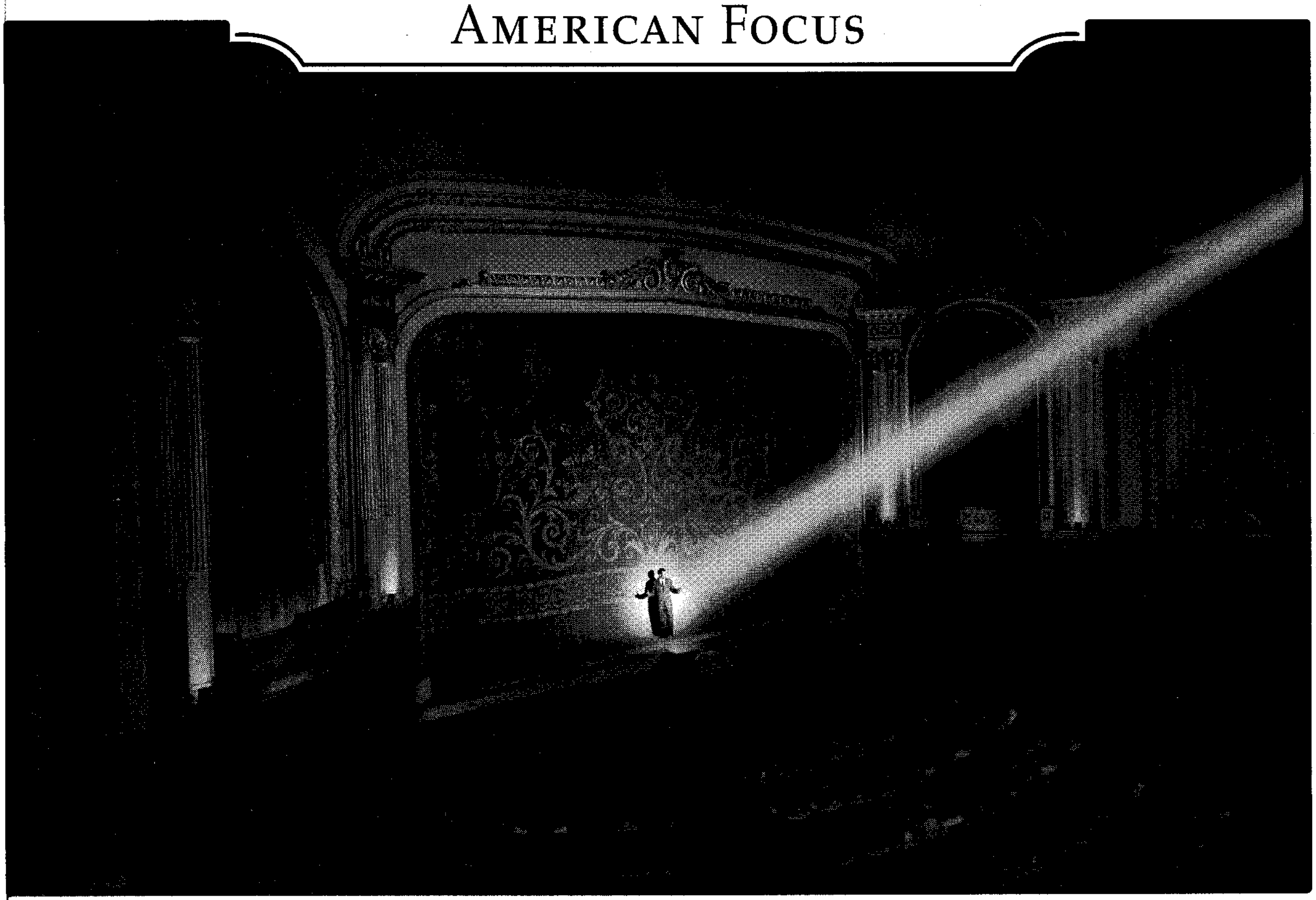
SUNSHINE CINEMA

139-143 E. Houston St. (212-358-0573)—Midnight movies. Jan. 2-3: "Delicatessen" (1991, Marc Caro and Jean-Pierre Jeunot; in French).

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through Jan. 12: "Not of This Earth: Sci-Fi Unbound." Dec. 31 at 1:30 and 6:15: "Quatermass and the Pit" (1967, Roy Ward Baker). ♦ Dec. 31 at 3:30 and 8:15: "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" (1977, Steven Spielberg). ♦ Jan. 1 at 2 and 7:30 and Jan. 2 at 4:15: "The Man Who Fell to Earth" (1976, Nicolas Roeg). ♦ Jan. 2 at 2 and 9 and Jan. 4 at 3: "Privilege" (1967, Peter Watkins). ♦ Jan. 2 at 7 and Jan. 4 at 1: "Punishment Park" (1971, Watkins). ♦ Jan. 3 at 1 and 5 and Jan. 5 at 4:15: "Gas-sss" (1971, Roger Corman). ♦ Jan. 3 at 2:45 and Jan. 5 at 2 and 6:15: "Lifeforce" (1985, Tobe Hooper). ♦ Jan. 3 at 6:45, Jan. 5 at 8:30, and Jan. 6 at 2: "Avalon" (2001, Mamoru Oshii; in Japanese). ♦ Jan. 4 at 5:15: "Until the End of the World" (1991, Wim Wenders; in German). ♦ Jan. 6 at 4:15: "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" (1978, Philip Kaufman).

AMERICAN FOCUS



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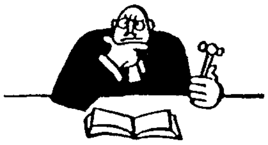
THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

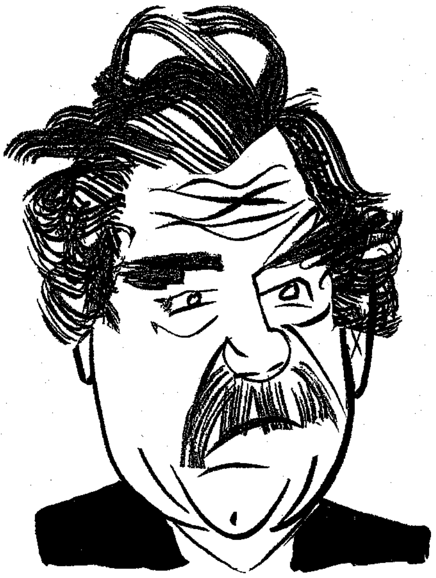
COMMENT

TRIALS



"Revenge Is Sour" is the title that George Orwell gave to a short essay on war-crimes trials, written just after the Second World War. "The whole idea of revenge and punishment is a childish day-dream," he argued. "Properly speaking, there is no such thing as revenge. Revenge is an act which you want to commit when you are powerless and because you are powerless: as soon as the sense of impotence is removed, the desire evaporates also." He cited the story of an old woman reported to have fired five shots into the body of Benito Mussolini, one for each of her dead sons. "I wonder how much satisfaction she got out of those five shots, which, doubtless, she had dreamed years earlier of firing," Orwell wrote. "The condition of her being able to get near enough to Mussolini to shoot at him was that he should be a corpse."

If revenge is psychologically impossible, justice is politically necessary—not the fantasy of righting monumental wrongs but the reality of holding wrongdoers to account. The twentieth century came and went without justice. None of the century's great totalitarians ever had to sit at a defense table, confer with lawyers, rise with the court when the judge entered the room. Mussolini was lynched; Hitler committed suicide; Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot died in old age. Two international tribunals are currently grinding away at more recent crimes; but the Hutu propagandists convicted of genocide in Rwanda last month were barely known outside that country, and Slobodan Milosevic was a second-tier dictator. The trial of Saddam Hussein will be the first of a world-class mass murderer. The number of potential counts against Saddam exceeds half a million. Behind the Kurdish, Shiite, and Sunni Arab Iraqis who were his principal victims stand Iranians and Kuwaitis with war-crimes charges of their own. Saddam imposed his name, his face, and his will on Iraqi history to a degree that makes lesser cults of personality seem like ordinary narcissism. The symbolic importance of his trial is exactly proportionate to his vast power.



Ann Clwyd, Tony Blair's special representative to Iraq, proclaimed, using American jargon, that Saddam's capture would bring "some kind of closure" to Iraqis. This thinking recalls the Bush Administration's original idea of a simple war of liberation, and shows as little grasp of the reality of Iraqis' lives. The insurgency against American and coalition forces gives no sign of relenting. Its inspirational leader has been ignobly caught, but guerrilla wars are seldom centrally controlled, the foreign occupiers remain in Iraq as targets, and the prospect of a more representative government is as threatening as ever to the privileged status of the country's Sunni Arabs. Nothing has been closed. Certain things, though, might now be opened. Large numbers of Iraqis—perhaps a silent majority—have had no desire to see a return to Baathist rule, but they have had little faith in the Americans' ability to prevent it and no way to protect themselves. Until now they've held back, almost literally staying home while chaos spreads in the streets and determined religious sectarians make bids for power. For these Iraqis, Saddam's demotion from mythic evil to the shabby figure who emerged from his hole sputtering, "I am Saddam Hussein, President of Iraq, and I am willing to nego-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

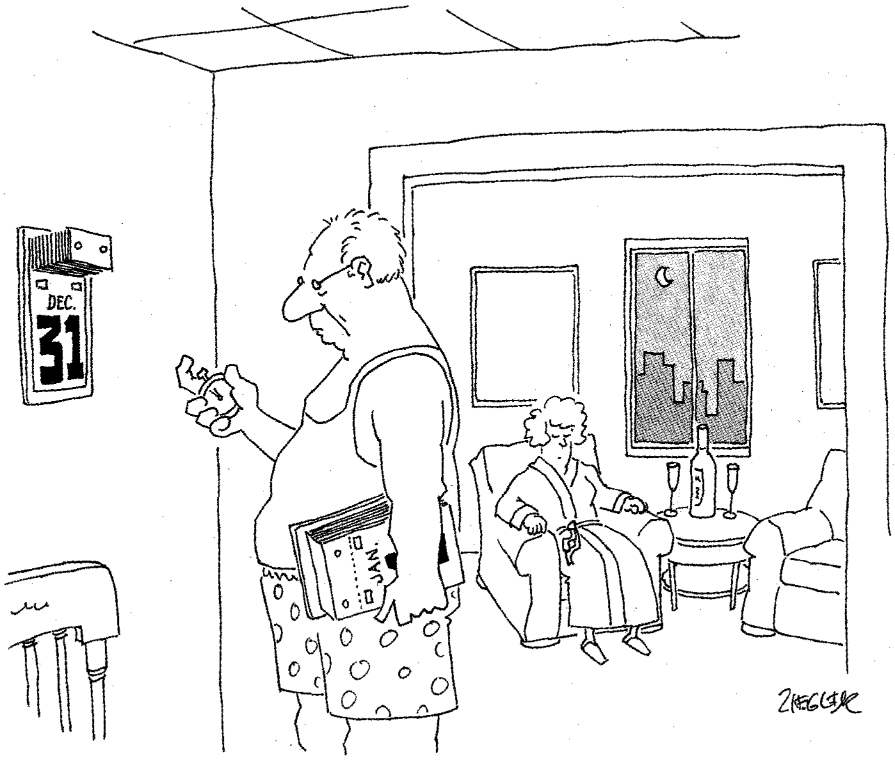
tiate," could lift a long shadow and mark the start of civic life.

The political direction that post-Saddam Iraq will take depends partly on the way Saddam himself is shown the exit. A few days before his capture, the Iraqi Governing Council announced the formation of a special court, to be run by Iraqis but with international support—a new model in the field of such tribunals. The court's jurisdiction will cover all members of Saddam's government accused of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and lesser offenses under Iraqi law. With High-Value Target No. 1 now in detention, Iraqi officials are talking about beginning proceedings against him as early as this spring. Saddam's C.I.A. interrogators won't hand him over immediately, but, in keeping with the Bush Administration's new policy of accelerating the return of sovereignty to the Iraqis, the occupation authority seems prepared to accept the Governing Council's terms. American officials in Baghdad and international legal experts regard one another with suspicion; most outsiders doubt the legitimacy of the court and have been reluctant to participate. The few that want to have largely been shut out. Human-rights groups are calling for a United Nations tribunal. President Bush wants the death penalty. The arguments over the court are depressingly familiar rehearsals of the arguments over the war itself, as if no one could bear to enter the next stage of Iraqi history.

The Iraqis have every right to insist on judging their tormentor themselves and, with a great deal of international (and not only American) help, they are capable of doing it. But the sudden convergence of American and Iraqi interests in speed raises the risk that the proceedings will be a shortcut to execution rather than a demonstration of real justice. The trial of Saddam Hussein will involve all Iraqis, just as his rule implicated them all. Kanan Makiya, the writer and longtime opponent of the regime, warned in his book "Cruelty and Silence," "Whether or not Saddam is still around in person, what he represented lives on inside Iraqi hearts. Herein lies the greatest danger of all for the country's future." As Saddam will likely argue in his own defense, some Iraqis (and also foreign governments, including ours) were active collaborators and beneficiaries. Many acquiesced silently; others internalized the Baath Party's paranoid and violent ideology, or just breathed the dead air of their own lifelong spider hole. Very few resisted without ending up in exile or the grave. The human damage is so great that even justice seems a poor consolation for what Iraqis truly need. This was the sentiment expressed by Mowaffak al-Rubaie, a Governing Council member who was imprisoned and tortured by the regime in 1979. After visiting Saddam in detention, Rubaie said, "He has ruined the whole country. He has ruined twenty-five million people."

But at least a trial will bring Iraqis face to face with what was done to them and what they became. In this sense, Saddam's capture represents the opposite of "closure." "I hate this man to the core of my bones," an Iraqi engineer told a *Times* reporter after watching footage of the King of the Arabs submitting to a mouth inspection like a vagrant at a mobile health clinic. "And yet, I can't tell you why, I feel sorry for him, to be so humiliated. It is as if he and Iraq have become the same thing." Separating Iraq from Saddam will be far harder than toppling a statue or capturing a fugitive. One way to begin is by resisting the illusion that killing Saddam will cleanse the legacy of Baathist rule, which, after all, was launched with televised trials and public hangings.

—*George Packer*



MAD AS HELL DEPT.
CAUSE FOR ALARM

One night a year ago, Aaron Friedman, a twenty-five-year-old classical-music composer and jazz saxophonist, was awakened, as he often had been, by the bleating ostinato of a car alarm. His apartment, in Washington Heights, looked onto a five-way intersection. There was a restaurant downstairs, and a post office and a bodega across the street, and, as a result, so much pedestrian and automobile traffic that the cars parked nearby were constantly being jostled into song. The block, Friedman had come to believe, was car-alarm central.

In a rage, Friedman went online. "I started doing research about car alarms and discovered that they were totally useless in preventing car theft," he said recently. "That's when this really became, you know, a vendetta." In short order, Friedman, who as the son of a Berkeley judge decided long ago to live an apolitical life, became an expert and an activist and, within a year, the citizen spirit behind what could soon be a total ban on car alarms in New York City.

First came the obvious: phone calls to the Mayor's office and the local councilman; a community-board speech. Then Friedman set out to create an alarm-eradication group. He searched the *Times* archives for people who had written letters to the editor featuring the term "car alarm," and called them on the phone: thirty citizens to the barricades. He also set up a Web site, www.silentmajorityny.org, which features legends (a mockingbird in Brooklyn that sings alarm songs), confessions ("A friend of mine once peed on a car with an alarm going off and I cheered him on"), and instances of wonderment ("I feel like I have road rage and I don't even have a car").

On the basis of Friedman's anti-noise noisemaking, the nonprofit group Transportation Alternatives took him on last winter as a consultant. He helped write the group's report "Alarmingly Useless," which documents the fact that car alarms, as we know them, at least, do not deter theft, though they do harm public health, impede education, and erode urban civility. The report also notes that silent car alarms are effective and available: an "immobilizer" that requires you to have a special key to start the car, a pager that alerts the owner, and only the owner, that his car is in distress.

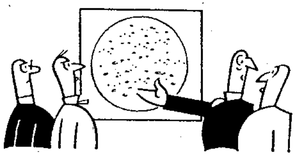
As it happens, Eva Moskowitz, the City Council member from the Upper East Side, was preparing to respond to one of the favorite complaints of her constituents. In April, a month after the release of "Alarmingly Useless," she proposed a bill that bans the use, sale, and installation of audible car alarms. It bears some resemblance, in her mind, to another landmark piece of legislation, the Pooper Scooper law of 1978. "Nobody, before Ed Koch, came along and said, 'Let's make people clean up after their dogs—that's the neighborly thing to do.' Sometimes there comes a certain point where people say, 'Why should we suffer?' "

A final hearing is scheduled for February, and Friedman has been asked to help round up witnesses: criminologists, experts in public health and auto insurance, and, of course, alarm-addled citizens. "For polemical purposes, I was hoping to get a mother nursing small children," he said. Recently, a woman in Flushing told him that car alarms routinely sabotage her children's naps. "Actually, a car-alarm installer told me the same story about his kids," Friedman said. "I was hoping he would come and talk about that."

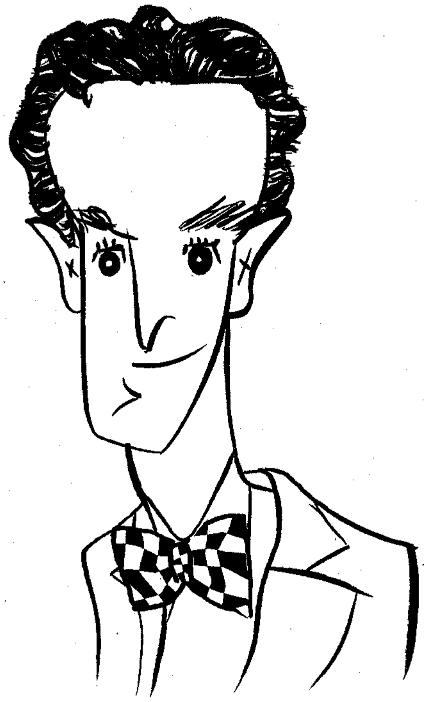
Friedman is six feet five. He speaks quietly and carefully—"the reasonable, sensitive guy, instead of the mad-as-hell-not-gonna-take-it-anymore guy," he says. In July, he moved to an apartment facing an alley, where he can compose in relative peace. Through his research, he has learned that the noise-bedevilled artist has distinguished precedents. In London a hundred and fifty years ago, for example, Charles Dickens and his illustrator John Leech, among other members of the new professional class of men who worked out of their homes, started a movement to stem the aural assault of the hurdy-gurdy players, who wanted to be paid before they would go away. Eventually, Alfred Lord Tennyson, John Everett Millais, and Wilkie Collins signed on to the cause, and the Act for the Better Regulation of Street Music in the Metropolis was passed. Organ-grinders gradually disappeared. Later, writers became nostalgic for them.

—*Karen Loew*

FINAL FRONTIER DEPT.
THE SUN ON MARS



Five years ago, at a meeting of Cornell University scientists to discuss the design of Mars probes for NASA, there was spirited debate, naturally, on the question of photometric calibration. What sort of apparatus would enable an unmanned spacecraft's cameras to adjust their color values to Mars' atmosphere? (The digital images radioed home by the Viking lander in 1976 were notoriously "over-pinked"; if you actually stood on Mars, you would see a landscape whose color resembled not cotton candy but butterscotch.) The consensus favored a post that would cast shadows across a "calibration target" of gray rings—and then Bill Nye piped up. Nye is a Cornell alumnus and a mechanical engineer whose hydraulic-pressure-resonance suppressor is used on the Boeing 747. But he is best known as the excitable, bow-tie-wearing, bubbling-beaker-holding host of the PBS show "Bill Nye the Science Guy," and he spoke now in his most irrepressible manner: "C'mon guys, it's got to be a sundial!"



Bill Nye

As Nye recalled, speaking by telephone the other day from his office in Seattle, the other scientists said, "Bill, we've got a lot of clocks already, man—it's a space program. *Space program.*" But Nye would not let the topic drop. Nye's father, Ned, was a quartermaster who spent most of the Second World War in Japanese prison camps. To stay sane, Ned Nye built sundials out of fence posts, using pebbles to establish the hour lines. Each day, he'd observe when the shadow was shortest and mark noon in the dust, then trace the migration of those marks over time—the analemma—to keep track of the Earth's orbit, and thus the passing of seasons and years.

After the war, Ned Nye's compulsion grew to fill his expanded horizons. As a travelling salesman for General Electric in the Washington, D.C., area, he would settle into a booth at a Hot Shoppe restaurant, order a club sandwich and an iced coffee, and then ask the waitress, “Know of any sundials around here?” He started an ill-starred business in “sand-dials” (sundials for the beach); suggested repurposing the Washington Monument as a giant sundial; and in 1969 published his opus, “Sundials of Maryland and Virginia.”

Similarly obsessed, Bill Nye finally persuaded his Cornell colleagues that sundials surrounded by gray rings would not only make photometric calibration possible but also mark the time, and “MarsDials” were built into the two Mars Exploration Rovers, the first of which, Spirit, will land on the Red Planet on January 3rd. Nye carried the day by pointing out that, because the Rovers would be roving about between Mars’ tropics—where the sun is more or less overhead in the sky—the sundials wouldn’t need a bulky triangular gnomon, or shadow-caster. They would require only a stick, like the ones his father used in the war.

The actual MarsDials are made of aluminum and are no larger than a human palm, but Nye believes that they will nonetheless inspire wonder. “Eratosthenes calculated the diameter of the Earth to within four per cent using the shadow from a stick,” he said. “Who knows what kids around the world will think of when they go to planetary.org and compare the shadow of a stick on Mars with the shadow of a stick on Earth? Or when they notice that the analemma on Mars is not figure-eight-shaped”—as it is on Earth— “but egg-shaped, because of Mars’ eccentric orbit?”

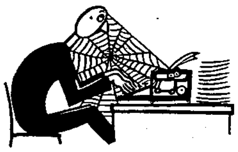
Nye hopes that the inhabitants of our world will coin a name for units of time on Mars (perhaps after they finally coin a name for the present decade on Earth). “A solar day on Mars is twenty-four Earth hours and twenty-nine minutes,” he said. “So are the divisions ‘mours’? Or perhaps ‘duo-Deimoses’ ”—the sixty Earth hours marked by two revolutions of Deimos, one of Mars’ moons. “Tiny Deimos has so little gravity,” he added enthusiastically, “you could stand on it and throw a tennis ball right into orbit!”

The MarsDials carry the epigraph “Two Worlds; One Sun,” and the word “Mars” in seventeen languages, including Mayan and Sumerian (in case the Rovers return to Earth through a wormhole and end up in 3000 B.C.). Nye also wrote a salute to future Mars explorers, inscribed alongside stick-figure drawings of dancing Earthlings, which are officially known as “sticksters.” His message says, in part, “We sent this craft in peace to learn of Mars’ past and to prepare for our future. To those who visit here, we wish a safe journey and the joy of discovery.”

Ned Nye died in 1997, and did not live to see his son’s sticks and sticksters. “As a child,” Nye said, “I would stand with my father on the beach in Delaware and stare at my shadow as the sun went down, watching it get longer and longer, infinitely long. When you understand how many stars are out there, more stars than there are grains of sand on the beach, you can think you’re just a speck orbiting a speck in the middle of specklessness. But there’s another way to look at it, which is that we have brains, and can use them to understand the universe. And I thought then that if I were out in space I could look back and see my shadow, the long shadow of little Bill.”

—*Tad Friend*

THE BENCH
A NOT SO BRIEF RECESS



Justice William J. Brennan, Jr., became known, in his thirty-four years on the Supreme Court, as perhaps the country’s foremost advocate of free speech and public access to information. Before his retirement from the Court, in 1990, he sought to extend this legacy by donating his papers to the Library of Congress and coöperating with an authorized biographer. The results, six years after his death, in 1997, may not be exactly what Brennan had in mind: thanks to the dawdling of his biographer, much of what he left behind has remained hidden from view, as inaccessible to the public as information can be.

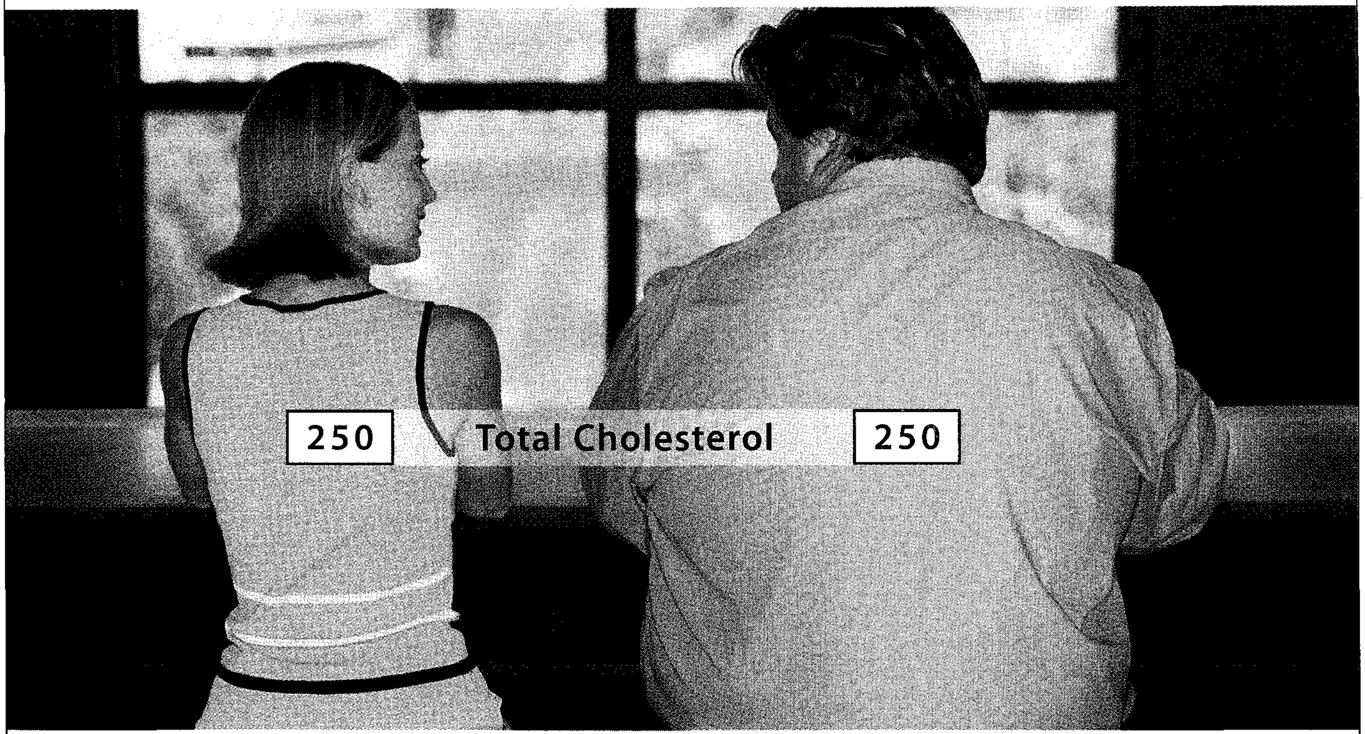
Brennan was appointed to the Court in 1956. As a result of various agreements, all of his legal papers through the 1970 term are available to the public. Many of the rest, covering the years that Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist has been on the Court, are restricted. This has rendered off limits an especially coveted set of documents known as Brennan’s case histories, in which he and his clerks reviewed the behind-the-scenes strategizing that produced each session’s most important decisions, such as Roe v. Wade, in 1973. (Researchers can apply to see the case histories, but opinions vary about how easy it is to get permission.) Brennan also directed the Library of Congress not to allow access to his personal correspondence and files until 2017.

There is one exception to these restrictions. To the frustration of other scholars, Brennan arranged for his biographer, Stephen Wermiel, to have exclusive access to everything in the collection, including the correspondence. Brennan gave Wermiel sixty-six interviews and had his clerks give many more. “Steve told me that no one was allowed to see the case histories except him,” said Dennis Hutchinson, a professor at the University of Chicago law school who recently published a biography of Justice Byron White. “I’d love to see them. Anybody who writes about the Supreme Court would.”

In a way, the problem isn’t so much Wermiel’s access as what little he has managed to make of it. Brennan selected Wermiel in 1986, when Wermiel was covering the Court for the *Wall Street Journal*. Seventeen years later, there’s no book, and Wermiel says that he is no longer even actively working on it. “I have sort of put it aside for the moment, to do some academic writing and to try to get tenure,” Wermiel said last week. He is fifty-three years old and an associate professor at American University’s Washington College of Law. “It’s taken a lot longer than I planned. I will get it done as soon as I can.” He estimated that the manuscript was twenty-five-to-thirty-per-cent done. (In a 1997 interview with a legal newspaper, Wermiel said the same thing: twenty-five-to-thirty-per-cent done.)

Judicial biographies are famously hard to complete. Gerald Gunther’s book on Learned Hand took twenty-

High cholesterol comes in all shapes and sizes.



Here's a tip. You can be active, thin, young or old. The truth is that high cholesterol may have as much to do with your family genes as food. So, even a strict diet may not be enough to lower it. The good news is that adding LIPITOR can help. It can lower your total cholesterol 29% to 45%.* And it can also lower your bad cholesterol 39% to 60%.* (*The average effect depends on the dose.) More than 18 million Americans have talked to their doctor about LIPITOR. Maybe you should too. Learn more. Find out if the #1 prescribed cholesterol medicine is right for you. Call us at 1-888-LIPITOR. Find us on the web at www.lipitor.com.

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Important information:

LIPITOR® (atorvastatin calcium) is a prescription drug used with diet to lower cholesterol. LIPITOR is not for everyone, including those with liver disease or possible liver problems, women who are nursing, pregnant, or may become pregnant. LIPITOR has not been shown to prevent heart disease or heart attacks.

If you take LIPITOR, tell your doctor about any unusual muscle pain or weakness. This could be a sign of serious side effects. It is important to tell your doctor about any medications you are currently taking to avoid possible serious drug interactions. Your doctor may do simple blood tests to monitor liver function before and during drug treatment. The most commonly reported side effects are gas, constipation, stomach pain and indigestion. They are usually mild and tend to go away.

Please see additional important information on next page.

LIPITOR® (Atorvastatin Calcium) Tablets
Brief Summary of Prescribing Information

CONTRAINDICATIONS: Active liver disease or unexplained persistent elevations of serum transaminases. Hypersensitivity to any component of this medication. **Pregnancy and Lactation** — Atherosclerosis is a chronic process and discontinuation of lipid-lowering drugs during pregnancy should have little impact on the outcome of long-term therapy of primary hypercholesterolemia. Cholesterol and other products of cholesterol biosynthesis are essential components for fetal development (including synthesis of steroids and cell membranes). Since HMG-CoA reductase inhibitors decrease cholesterol synthesis and possibly the synthesis of other biologically active substances derived from cholesterol, they may cause fetal harm when administered to pregnant women. Therefore, HMG-CoA reductase inhibitors are contraindicated during pregnancy and in nursing mothers. ATORVASTATIN SHOULD BE ADMINISTERED TO WOMEN OF CHILDBEARING AGE ONLY WHEN SUCH PATIENTS ARE HIGHLY UNLIKELY TO CONCEIVE AND HAVE BEEN INFORMED OF THE POTENTIAL HAZARDS. If the patient becomes pregnant while taking this drug, therapy should be discontinued and the patient apprised of the potential hazard to the fetus.

WARNINGS: Liver Dysfunction — HMG-CoA reductase inhibitors, like some other lipid-lowering therapies, have been associated with biochemical abnormalities of liver function. **Persistent elevations (>3 times the upper limit of normal [ULN] occurring on 2 or more occasions) in serum transaminases occurred in 0.7% of patients who received atorvastatin in clinical trials. The incidence of these abnormalities was 0.2%, 0.2%, 0.6%, and 2.3% for 10, 20, 40, and 80 mg, respectively.** One patient in clinical trials developed jaundice. Increases in liver function tests (LFT) in other patients were not associated with jaundice or other clinical signs or symptoms. Upon dose reduction, drug interruption, or discontinuation, transaminase levels returned to or near pretreatment levels without sequelae. Eighteen of 30 patients with persistent LFT elevations continued treatment with a reduced dose of atorvastatin. **It is recommended that liver function tests be performed prior to and at 12 weeks following both the initiation of therapy and any elevation of dose, and periodically (eg, semiannually) thereafter.** Liver enzyme changes generally occur in the first 3 months of treatment with atorvastatin. Patients who develop increased transaminase levels should be monitored until the abnormalities resolve. Should an increase in ALT or AST of >3 times ULN persist, reduction of dose or withdrawal of atorvastatin is recommended. Atorvastatin should be used with caution in patients who consume substantial quantities of alcohol and/or have a history of liver disease. Active liver disease or unexplained persistent transaminase elevations are contraindications to the use of atorvastatin (see CONTRAINDICATIONS). **Skeletal Muscle — Rare cases of rhabdomyolysis with acute renal failure secondary to myoglobinuria have been reported with atorvastatin and with other drugs in this class.** Uncomplicated myalgia has been reported in atorvastatin-treated patients (see ADVERSE REACTIONS). Myopathy, defined as muscle aches or muscle weakness in conjunction with increases in creatine phosphokinase (CPK) values >10 times ULN, should be considered in any patient with diffuse myalgias, muscle tenderness or weakness, and/or marked elevation of CPK. Patients should be advised to report promptly unexplained muscle pain, tenderness or weakness, particularly if accompanied by malaise or fever. Atorvastatin therapy should be discontinued if markedly elevated CPK levels occur or myopathy is diagnosed or suspected. The risk of myopathy during treatment with drugs in this class is increased with concurrent administration of cyclosporine, fibric acid derivatives, erythromycin, niacin, or azole antifungals. Physicians considering combined therapy with atorvastatin and fibric acid derivatives, erythromycin, immunosuppressive drugs, azole antifungals, or lipid-lowering doses of niacin should carefully weigh the potential benefits and risks and should carefully monitor patients for any signs or symptoms of muscle pain, tenderness, or weakness, particularly during the initial months of therapy and during any periods of upward dosage titration of either drug. Periodic creatine phosphokinase (CPK) determinations may be considered in such situations, but there is no assurance that such monitoring will prevent the occurrence of severe myopathy. **Atorvastatin therapy should be temporarily withheld or discontinued in any patient with an acute, serious condition suggestive of a myopathy or having a risk factor predisposing to the development of renal failure secondary to rhabdomyolysis (eg, severe acute infection, hypotension, major surgery, trauma, severe metabolic, endocrine and electrolyte disorders, and uncontrolled seizures).**

PRECAUTIONS: General — Before instituting therapy with atorvastatin, an attempt should be made to control hypercholesterolemia with appropriate diet, exercise, and weight reduction in obese patients, and to treat other underlying medical problems (see INDICATIONS AND USAGE in full prescribing information). **Information for Patients** — Patients should be advised to report promptly unexplained muscle pain, tenderness, or weakness, particularly if accompanied by malaise or fever. **Drug Interactions** — The risk of myopathy during treatment with drugs of this class is increased with concurrent administration of cyclosporine, fibric acid derivatives, niacin (nicotinic acid), erythromycin, azole antifungals (see WARNINGS, Skeletal Muscle). ***Antacid:*** When atorvastatin and Maalox® TC suspension were coadministered, plasma concentrations of atorvastatin decreased approximately 35%. However, LDL-C reduction was not altered. ***Antipyrine:*** Because atorvastatin does not affect the pharmacokinetics of antipyrine, interactions with other drugs metabolized via the same cytochrome isozymes are not expected. ***Colestipol:*** Plasma concentrations of atorvastatin decreased approximately 25% when colestipol and atorvastatin were coadministered. However, LDL-C reduction was greater when atorvastatin and colestipol were coadministered than when either drug was given alone. ***Cimetidine:*** Atorvastatin plasma concentrations and LDL-C reduction were not altered by coadministration of cimetidine. ***Digoxin:*** When multiple doses of atorvastatin and digoxin were coadministered, steady-state plasma digoxin concentrations increased by approximately 20%. Patients taking digoxin should be monitored appropriately. ***Erythromycin:*** In healthy individuals, plasma concentrations of atorvastatin increased approximately 40% with coadministration of atorvastatin and erythromycin, a known inhibitor of cytochrome P450 3A4 (see WARNINGS, Skeletal Muscle). ***Oral Contraceptives:*** Coadministration of atorvastatin and an oral contraceptive increased AUC values for norethindrone and ethinyl estradiol by approximately 30% and 20%. These increases should be considered when selecting an oral contraceptive for a woman taking atorvastatin. ***Warfarin:*** Atorvastatin had no clinically significant effect on prothrombin time when administered to patients receiving chronic warfarin treatment. **Endocrine Function** — HMG-CoA reductase inhibitors interfere with cholesterol synthesis and theoretically might blunt adrenal and/or gonadal steroid production. Clinical studies have shown that atorvastatin does not reduce basal plasma cortisol concentration or impair adrenal reserve. The effects of HMG-CoA reductase inhibitors on male fertility have not been studied in adequate numbers of patients. The effects, if any, on the pituitary-gonadal axis in premenopausal women are unknown. Caution should be exercised if an HMG-CoA reductase inhibitor is administered concomitantly with drugs that may decrease the levels or activity of endogenous steroid hormones, such as ketoconazole, spironolactone, and cimetidine. **CNS Toxicity** — Brain hemorrhage was seen in a female dog treated for 3 months at 120 mg/kg/day. Brain hemorrhage and optic nerve vacuolation were seen in another female dog that was sacrificed in moribund condition after 11 weeks of escalating doses up to 280 mg/kg/day. The 120 mg/kg dose resulted in a systemic exposure approximately 16 times the human plasma area-under-the-curve (AUC, 0-24 hours) based on the maximum human dose of 80 mg/day. A single tonic convulsion was seen in each of 2 male dogs (one treated at 10 mg/kg/day and one at 120 mg/kg/day) in a 2-year study. No CNS lesions have been observed in mice after chronic treatment for up to 2 years at doses up to 400 mg/kg/day or in rats at doses up to 100 mg/kg/day. These doses were 6 to 11 times (mouse) and 8 to 16 times (rat) the human AUC (0-24) based on the maximum recommended human dose of 80 mg/day. CNS vascular lesions, characterized by perivascular hemorrhages, edema, and mononuclear cell infiltration of perivascular spaces, have been observed in dogs treated with other members of this class. A chemically similar drug in this class produced optic nerve degeneration (Wallerian degeneration of retinogeniculate fibers) in clinically normal dogs in a dose-dependent fashion at a dose that produced plasma drug levels about 30 times higher than the mean drug level in humans taking the highest recommended dose. **Carcinogenesis, Mutagenesis, Impairment of Fertility** — In a 2-year carcinogenicity study in rats at dose levels of 10, 30, and 100 mg/kg/day, 2 rare tumors were found in muscle in high-dose females: in one, there was a rhabdomyosarcoma and, in another, there was a fibrosarcoma. This dose represents a plasma AUC (0-24) value of approximately 16 times the mean human plasma drug exposure after an 80 mg oral dose. A 2-year carcinogenicity study in mice given 100, 200, or 400 mg/kg/day resulted in a significant increase in liver adenomas in high-dose males and liver carcinomas in high-dose females. These findings occurred at plasma AUC (0-24) values of approximately 6 times the mean human plasma drug exposure after an 80 mg oral dose. *In vitro,* atorvastatin was not mutagenic or clastogenic in the following tests with and without metabolic activation: the Ames test with *Salmonella typhimurium* and *Escherichia coli,* the HGPRT forward mutation assay in Chinese hamster lung cells, and the chromosomal aberration assay in Chinese hamster lung cells. Atorvastatin was negative in the *in vivo* mouse micronucleus test. Studies in rats performed at doses up to 175 mg/kg (15 times the human exposure) produced no changes in fertility. There was aplasia and aspermia in the epididymis of 2 of 10 rats treated with 100 mg/kg/day of atorvastatin for 3 months (16 times the human AUC at the 80 mg dose); testis weights were significantly lower at 30 and 100 mg/kg and epididymal weight was lower at 100 mg/kg. Male rats given 100 mg/kg/day for 11 weeks prior to mating had decreased sperm motility, spermatid head concentration, and increased abnormal sperm. Atorvastatin caused no adverse effects on semen parameters, or reproductive organ histopathology in dogs given doses of 10, 40, or 120 mg/kg for two years. **Pregnancy — Pregnancy Category X: See CONTRAINDICATIONS.** Safety in pregnant women has not been established. Atorvastatin crosses the rat placenta and reaches a level in fetal liver equivalent to that of maternal plasma. Atorvastatin was not teratogenic in rats at doses up to 300 mg/kg/day or in rabbits at doses up to 100 mg/kg/day. These doses resulted in multiples of about 30 times (rat) or 20 times (rabbit) the human exposure based on surface area (mg/m^2). In a study in rats given 20, 100, or 225 mg/kg/day, from gestation day 7 through to lactation day 21 (weaning), there was decreased pup survival at birth, neonate, weaning, and maturity in pups of mothers dosed with 225 mg/kg/day. Body weight was decreased on days 4 and 21 in pups of mothers dosed at 100 mg/kg/day; pup body weight was decreased at birth and at days 4, 21, and 91 at 225 mg/kg/day. Pup development was delayed (rotorod performance at 100 mg/kg/day and acoustic startle at 225 mg/kg/day; pinnae detachment and eye opening at 225 mg/kg/day). These doses correspond to 6 times (100 mg/kg) and 22 times (225 mg/kg) the human AUC at 80 mg/day. Rare reports of congenital anomalies have been received following intrauterine exposure to HMG-CoA reductase inhibitors. There has been one report of severe congenital bony deformity, tracheo-esophageal fistula, and anal atresia (VATER association) in a baby born to a woman who took lovastatin with dextroamphetamine sulfate during the first trimester of pregnancy. LIPITOR should be administered to women of child-bearing potential only when such patients are highly unlikely to conceive and have been informed of the potential hazards. If the woman becomes pregnant while taking LIPITOR, it should be discontinued and the patient advised again as to the potential hazards to the fetus. **Nursing Mothers** — Nursing rat pups had plasma and liver drug levels of 50% and 40%, respectively, of that in their mother's milk. Because of the potential for adverse reactions in nursing infants, women taking LIPITOR should not breast-feed (see CONTRAINDICATIONS). **Pediatric Use** — Safety and effectiveness in patients 10-17 years of age with heterozygous familial hypercholesterolemia have been evaluated in controlled clinical trials of 6 months duration in adolescent boys and postmenarchal girls. Patients treated with LIPITOR had an adverse experience profile generally similar to that of patients treated with placebo, the most common adverse experiences observed in both groups, regardless of causality assessment, were infections. **Doses greater than 20 mg have not been studied in this patient population.** In this limited controlled study, there was no detectable effect on growth or sexual maturation in boys or on menstrual cycle length in girls. See CLINICAL PHARMACOLOGY, *Clinical Studies section* in full prescribing information; ADVERSE REACTIONS, *Pediatric Patients*; and DOSAGE AND ADMINISTRATION, *Pediatric patients (10-17 years of age) with Heterozygous Familial Hypercholesterolemia* in full prescribing information. Adolescent females should be counseled on appropriate contraceptive methods while on LIPITOR therapy (see CONTRAINDICATIONS and PRECAUTIONS, *Pregnancy*). **LIPITOR has not been studied in controlled clinical trials involving pre-pubertal patients or patients younger than 10 years of age.** Clinical efficacy with doses up to 80 mg/day for 1 year have been evaluated in an uncontrolled study of patients with homozygous FH including 8 pediatric patients. See CLINICAL PHARMACOLOGY, *Clinical Studies in Homozygous Familial Hypercholesterolemia* in full prescribing information. **Geriatric Use** — The safety and efficacy of atorvastatin (10-80 mg) in the geriatric population (≥65 years of age) was evaluated in the ACCESS study. In this 54-week open-label trial 1,958 patients initiated therapy with atorvastatin 10 mg. Of these, 835 were elderly (≥65 years) and 1,123 were non-elderly. The mean change in LDL-C from baseline after 6 weeks of treatment with atorvastatin 10 mg was -38.2% in the elderly patients versus -34.6% in the non-elderly group. The rates of discontinuation due to adverse events were similar between the two age groups. There were no differences in clinically relevant laboratory abnormalities between the age groups.

ADVERSE REACTIONS: LIPITOR is generally well-tolerated. Adverse reactions have usually been mild and transient. In controlled clinical studies of 2502 patients, <2% of patients were discontinued due to adverse experiences attributable to atorvastatin. The most frequent adverse events thought to be related to atorvastatin were constipation, flatulence, dyspepsia, and abdominal pain. **Clinical Adverse Experiences** — Adverse experiences reported in ≥2% of patients in placebo-controlled clinical studies of atorvastatin, regardless of causality assessment, are shown in the following table.

Adverse Events in Placebo-Controlled Studies (% of Patients)

BODY SYSTEM Adverse Event	Placebo N = 270	Atorvastatin 10 mg N = 863	Atorvastatin 20 mg N = 36	Atorvastatin 40 mg N = 79	Atorvastatin 80 mg N = 94
BODY AS A WHOLE					
Infection	10.0	10.3	2.8	10.1	7.4
Headache	7.0	5.4	16.7	2.5	6.4
Accidental Injury	3.7	4.2	0.0	1.3	3.2
Flu Syndrome	1.9	2.2	0.0	2.5	3.2
Abdominal Pain	0.7	2.8	0.0	3.8	2.1
Back Pain	3.0	2.8	0.0	3.8	1.1
Allergic Reaction	2.6	0.9	2.8	1.3	0.0
Asthenia	1.9	2.2	0.0	3.8	0.0
DIGESTIVE SYSTEM					
Constipation	1.8	2.1	0.0	2.5	1.1
Diarrhea	1.5	2.7	0.0	3.8	5.3
Dyspepsia	4.1	2.3	2.8	1.3	2.1
Flatulence	3.3	2.1	2.8	1.3	1.1
RESPIRATORY SYSTEM					
Sinusitis	2.6	2.8	0.0	2.5	6.4
Pharyngitis	1.5	2.5	0.0	1.3	2.1
SKIN AND APPENDAGES					
Rash	0.7	3.9	2.8	3.8	1.1
MUSCULOSKELETAL SYSTEM					
Arthralgia	1.5	2.0	0.0	5.1	0.0
Myalgia	1.1	3.2	5.6	1.3	0.0

The following adverse events were reported, regardless of causality assessment in patients treated with atorvastatin in clinical trials. The events in italics occurred in ≥2% of patients and the events in plain type occurred in <2% of patients.

Body as a Whole: *Chest pain*, face edema, fever, neck rigidity, malaise, photosensitivity reaction, generalized edema. ***Digestive System:*** *Nausea*, gastroenteritis, liver function tests abnormal, colitis, vomiting, gastritis, dry mouth, rectal hemorrhage, esophagitis, eructation, glossitis, mouth ulceration, anorexia, increased appetite, stomatitis, biliary pain, cheilitis, duodenal ulcer, dysphagia, enteritis, melena, gum hemorrhage, stomach ulcer, tenesmus, ulcerative stomatitis, hepatitis, pancreatitis, cholestatic jaundice. ***Respiratory System:*** *Bronchitis, rhinitis*, pneumonia, dyspnea, asthma, epistaxis. ***Nervous System:*** *Insomnia, dizziness*, paresthesia, somnolence, amnesia, abnormal dreams, libido decreased, emotional lability, incoordination, peripheral neuropathy, torticollis, facial paralysis, hyperkinesia, depression, hypesthesia, hypertonia. ***Musculoskeletal System:*** *Arthritis*, leg cramps, bursitis, tenosynovitis, myasthenia, tendinous contracture, myositis. ***Skin and Appendages:*** Pruritus, contact dermatitis, alopecia, dry skin, sweating, acne, urticaria, eczema, seborrhea, skin ulcer. ***Urogenital System:*** *Urinary tract infection*, urinary frequency, cystitis, hematuria, impotence, dysuria, kidney calculus, nocturia, epididymitis, fibrocystic breast, vaginal hemorrhage, albuminuria, breast enlargement, metrorrhagia, nephritis, urinary incontinence, urinary retention, urinary urgency, abnormal ejaculation, uterine hemorrhage. ***Special Senses:*** Amblyopia, tinnitus, dry eyes, refraction disorder, eye hemorrhage, deafness, glaucoma, parosmia, taste loss, taste perversion. ***Cardiovascular System:*** Palpitation, vasodilatation, syncope, migraine, postural hypotension, phlebitis, arrhythmia, angina pectoris, hypertension. ***Metabolic and Nutritional Disorders:*** *Peripheral edema*, hyperglycemia, creatine phosphokinase increased, gout, weight gain, hypoglycemia. ***Hemic and Lymphatic System:*** Ecchymosis, anemia, lymphadenopathy, thrombocytopenia, petechia. **Postintroduction Reports** — Adverse events associated with LIPITOR therapy reported since market introduction, that are not listed above, regardless of causality assessment, include the following: anaphylaxis, angioneurotic edema, bullous rashes (including erythema multiforme, Stevens-Johnson syndrome, and toxic epidermal necrolysis), and rhabdomyolysis. **Pediatric Patients (ages 10-17 years)** In a 26-week controlled study in boys and postmenarchal girls (n=140), the safety and tolerability profile of LIPITOR 10 to 20 mg daily was generally similar to that of placebo (see CLINICAL PHARMACOLOGY, *Clinical Studies section* in full prescribing information and PRECAUTIONS, *Pediatric Use*).

OVERDOSAGE: There is no specific treatment for atorvastatin overdosage. In the event of an overdose, the patient should be treated symptomatically, and supportive measures instituted as required. Due to extensive drug binding to plasma proteins, hemodialysis is not expected to significantly enhance atorvastatin clearance.

Please see full prescribing information for additional information about LIPITOR.

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two years. Andrew Kaufman's study of Benjamin Cardozo took even longer. Paul Freund spent more than twenty years on his study of the Supreme Court and the New Deal and never finished it. Generally speaking, privileged access has often gone hand in hand with glacial procrastination: Frank Bidart's extended immersion in the life and work of Robert Lowell, Edmund Morris's tortuous struggle with the mind of Ronald Reagan. Perhaps without fear of competition, you dally awhile in the archives.

Still, Justice Brennan's family has viewed Wermiel's writer's block, if that's what it is, with mounting dismay. "He is the official Boswell," said the justice's son, William J. Brennan III, a prominent lawyer in New Jersey. "It would be nice if he would avail himself of the opportunity. My father had hoped that he would see the biography at least in draft form before he died. The big problem is that Wermiel had these original sources that are unavailable to others who follow. We are frustrated."

Abner Mikva, the former judge who introduced Wermiel to Brennan, now seems to regret doing so. "It's like getting a patent and not putting the product out on the market," he said.

"I will confess that I don't think I knew how enormous the task would be," Wermiel said. "I don't think I knew what was involved in dealing with a justice's papers. There are those who don't understand why I haven't finished, and they are impatient and frustrated. And there are my friends, who think I'll get it done when I get it done. It becomes more complicated as time goes on."

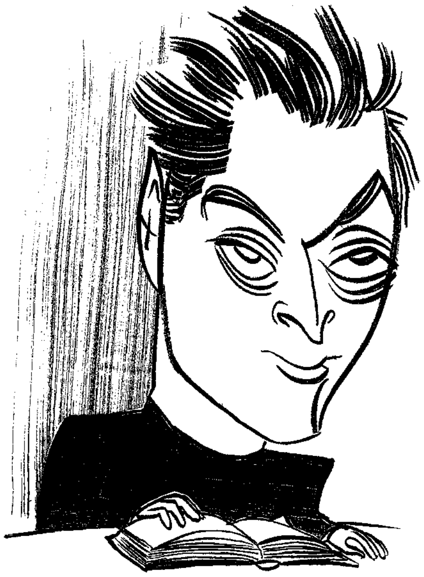
—*Jeffrey Toobin*

INK

AUSTER AFTERNOONS

"Isn't there supposed to be a reading here in about twenty minutes?" I asked. . . . "It was cancelled," the bartender said. "With all that slop out there today, there wouldn't have been much point to it. Poetry's a beautiful thing, but it's hardly worth freezing your ass off for."

This interchange takes place early in Paul Auster's novel "Leviathan." As his readers know, many small happenings in his novels have an uncanny prescience about them; and this one in particular seemed likely to be confirmed by reality the other day, when the first blizzard of winter blew in, muffling streets and minds. That afternoon, Paul Auster was to begin reading his new novel, "Oracle Night," in its entirety, in two four-hour sessions, one on Saturday and one on Sunday, at the Paula Cooper Gallery, on West Twenty-first Street.



Paul Auster

Close to the appointed hour, people straggled in from the outside whirl, with much stamping of boots and shedding of coats and scarves, entering the long upstairs gallery, warm and well lit, where a hundred and sixty chairs waited in silent rows. Bit by bit, they were taken over by occupants, who made small camps out of them, often clutching fresh copies of the novel, until some fifty expectant souls faced a small table, bearing only a microphone and a bottle of water. Jack Macrae, co-proprietor, with Paula Cooper, of 192 Books, the bookshop that was fathering the event, congratulated the members of the audience on their presence, explained the proceeding—a full reading, with a break every hour—and introduced Auster, who, tall and grave and dressed in gray, took his seat at the table, book in hand.

With little preamble, he began to read, in an even tone, holding the book in one hand, his eyes fixed on the page. Sometimes during the reading, his free hand would parse the prose with finger movements, like a miniature conductor. "Oracle Night" is written in the first person, which made it easy for the author to be its narrator; and, as the story began to unfold, its listeners settled into various postures of attention. A few of them were following the text from their copies of the book, perhaps in fear that the author might skip a paragraph, as small children do at bedtime. Others would occasionally reach for the book to find the place and single out a sentence to underline or just to remember. A number of others seemed turned to stone, statues with ears. One woman buried her head in an ample anorak, making a private darkness for herself.

The ten-minute intermissions were just enough for some people to change wavelengths. "Supposing this catches on, the way poetry readings did after Dylan Thomas," one woman whispered. "Can you imagine? Tom Wolfe reading his new novel—a weeklong event." But the novel called, the parenthesis closed, and the voice and the story unrolled.

There were comings and goings throughout—newcomers from the cold, arriving for a taste of the occasion, others leaving for their own Saturday nights. The audience swelled and ebbed, but all the seats were eventually sat in.

During the intermissions, the author moved about easily, signing a book, greeting a friend, as curious about the experiment as his listeners were: "You know, it's not at all like a reading, where you read chosen passages. There you perform, you project the text, you look at the audience. Here I hardly look up, I'm reading the book as much to myself as to anyone else."

Saturday gave way to Sunday, and the blizzard gave way to an afternoon of golden sun. A new audience assembled for the second half of the story, with a small knot of staunch listeners from the previous day who looked determined to listen to the last syllable. The text had turned into a whole landscape by now, and, as it entered the foothills of conclusion, attention tightened. Inevitably, Auster read the last sentence, closed the book, and stood to an applause that was a mixture of astonishment, exhilaration, and relief.

—*Alastair Reid*

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PERSONAL HISTORY

DOG TROUBLE

What can you do when your dog has gone wrong?

BY CATHLEEN SCHINE

Four years ago, I was in a relationship that everyone who cared about me considered abusive. I was covered with bruises and scars. When my older son came home from college, he was greeted with a scene of loud, belligerent menace. My younger son, who still lived with us, tried to reach out, but more often than not his kindness was met by violence. My mother was terrified and refused to set foot in our house. In fact, no one came to visit us anymore. Nor were we welcome at anyone else's house. Even a short walk on the street held the threat of an ugly brawl. At night, I lay in bed, felt the warmth of his body beside me, and tried not to move. I didn't want to set him off. He was volatile, unpredictable. But I felt responsible for him. And, against all odds, I loved him.

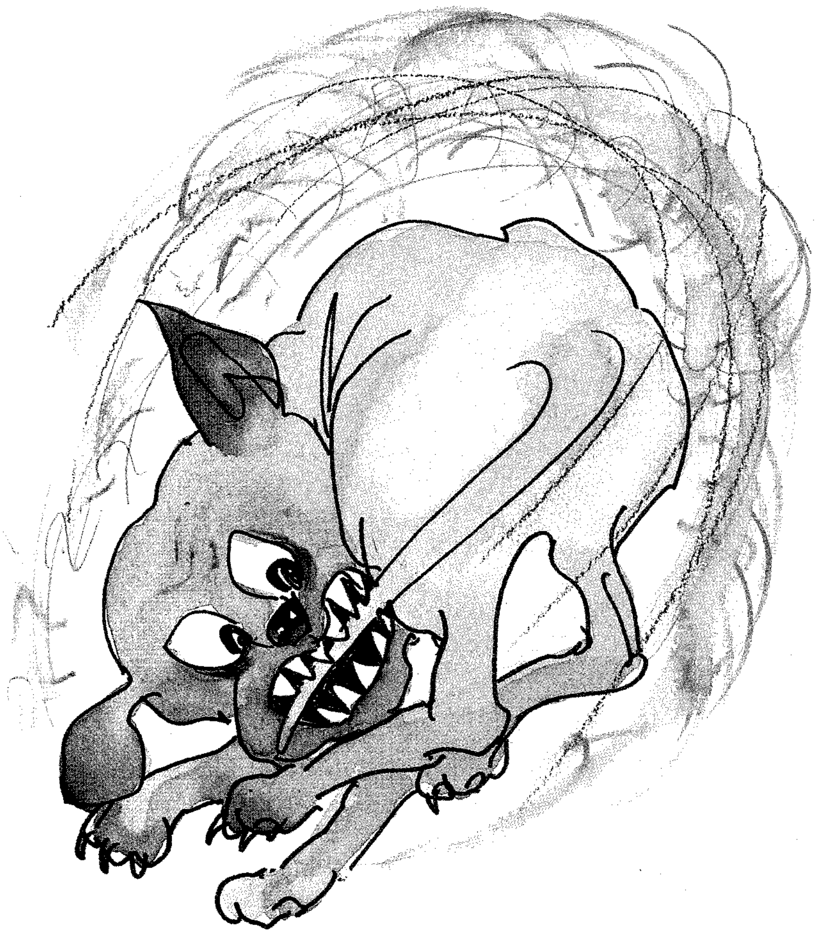
He was not my husband, with whom I had just split up. Nor was he my boyfriend. (I had made one of those unforeseen middle-aged discoveries and was living with a woman.) My looming, destructive, desperate, and compelling companion was not even a human being. He was a dog. Or, as my friends and family pointed out, he was "just" a dog.

He appeared to be a lovely little dog, about two and half years old, when we first saw him. It was a spring day, and he stood at the end of a long line of caged dogs in a Los Angeles pet-supply store, all strays to be adopted, all barking and yapping and hurling themselves against their wire enclosures. But he neither barked nor yapped. He stood politely, his head cocked expectantly. He wagged his tail in vigorous anticipation. When I picked him up, he squirmed with joy and lunged, ecstatic, licking my face, overwhelming me with a wave of urgent, instant love.

"Why do you want a dog?" my mother asked me. "I know why you want a dog. Because your son is going to college." She looked at me pityingly. "When you went to college, I got a geranium."

Buster, which is what we named him, was a seventeen-pound bowlegged mutt with a nondescript coat of short brown hair and a bulldog chest. His tail was far too long for his body, a dachshund's tail. One ear stood up, the other flopped down. His face had the big, worried eyes of a Chihuahua, the anxious furrowed brow of a pug, and the markings of a German shepherd. He yodelled like a beagle and shook his toys with the neck-wrenching vigor of a pit bull terrier. A tough stray missing two toes on his left hind foot, he had been picked up in South L.A. and dumped in the city pound, where, we were told, larger dogs stole his food, until, the day before he was to be euthanized, he was saved by a private rescue group that tried to find a home for him. After we discovered Buster, a representative of the group came to our house to make sure it was safe for the dog. She neglected to tell us that the dog was not safe for us. Perhaps the rescuers were blinded by hope, since we had lifted the dog from his crate and hugged and kissed him with no ill effect. Perhaps they were confused. They had so many dogs to place in homes. Perhaps they were simply desperate.

I grew up reading books about heroic collies. It was from the novels of the popular writer Albert Payson Terhune, treasured by my father before me, that I learned the word "puttee." Terhune would don a pair to walk through the grounds of Sunnybank. I also learned about "carrion," in which his dogs would roll luxuriously, and a "veranda," on which they would sit of an evening, curled contentedly at the feet of their god. Sunnybank was two generations and several classes and ethnic groups away from my world. Terhune, who in the books referred to himself as the Master, raised collies on a sprawling estate in northern New Jersey, which in his novels was called The Place. As impeccably bred as Sunnybank Lad, the Master claimed ancestors who had come to the New World from Holland and England in the seventeenth century. Terhune heatedly defended the rights of dogs and trees, but he was not a man of the people. There is a wonderful story by James Thurber describing the Master's highborn rage ("like summer thunder") when a Mr. Jacob R. Ellis and family, Midwestern tourists come to take a gander at Sunnybank in their Ford sedan, ran over the beloved champion Sunnybank Jean. And the Master's disgust for Negroes and the "rich city dweller of sweatshop origin" was virulent and unashamed. But I noticed none of that as a child, for we had collies, too. Our patient, plodding dogs with their matted ruffs in no way resembled the grand animals of the novels, but they did follow my brother and me protectively around the neighborhood. Would they have leaped at the throat of an attacker, like Buff of "Buff: A Collie" or Lad in "The Juggernaut"? Would they have instinctively guided stolen sheep back into their proper herd? Or wandered for months, living on squirrels, looking for me, their only true Mistress? One of them took long walks every day with an inmate from the sanitarium just down the road. They herded children during recess at an elementary school nearby. They wandered for miles until someone from several towns away would check their tags and call us to come get them, at which point they would greet us with unalloyed, and unsurprised, joy. This was my background with dogs: they were in the background. Or they were in books.



On his first night at home, in a portent of things to come, Buster attacked himself.

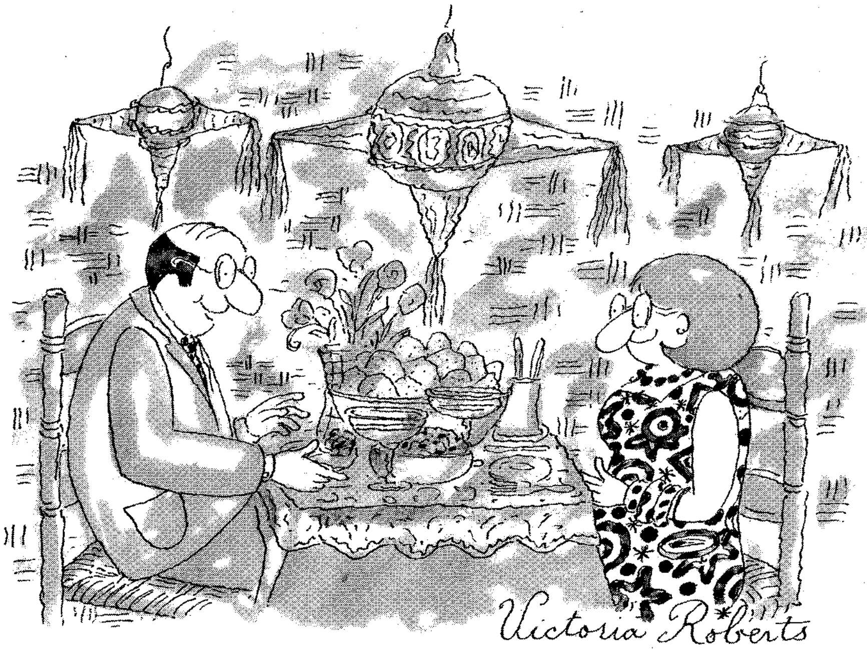
JULES FEIFFER

Then one afternoon when I was eight, and unaccountably home alone, sitting in front of the Admiral TV with its big round knobs, watching "The Mickey Mouse Club," my chin resting on my knees, Laurie, our small mahogany-colored collie, poked her nose in my face. I pushed her away. She whined and whimpered. I ignored her. She pushed my shoulder, hard. She licked my face, pushed again, barked, ran frantically to the door and back, whining, licking, nudging, until I tore myself away from the television and allowed myself to be herded through the kitchen and to the front door, where the dog planted her feet, barking and wagging her tail, until I understood. Smoke and flames were billowing from the bedroom hallway. Our squat little collie had saved my life.

Devotion to a dog like that is not hard for anyone to understand. But how do you explain your devotion to a dog who is not man's best friend? Who is neither noble nor loyal? There is a popular training book called "No Bad Dogs," but what happens when one is indeed bad and he belongs to you? What happens when bad dogs happen to good, or at least conscientious, people? When an animal defies kindness, defies the culture of therapy, and refuses to be redeemed?

On our very first evening with the little stray, we proudly placed his bowl of food on the kitchen floor. He rushed toward it, poking his muzzle eagerly into the organic human-grade kibble. We watched him, happy that we had rescued him from his hard, hungry life. There is something profoundly satisfying about taking in a creature no one else wants, a delicious flicker of moral superiority, and the surprisingly powerful pleasure of generosity. We watched our dog, a bit smug, perhaps, but, as I look back at the two of us, a new couple opening our lives to a needy dog, I feel only compassion. We had no idea what lay in store. Suddenly, Buster lifted his Chihuahua head. He jerked his pug face back toward his dachshund tail. He bared his pit-bull fangs, and—this all happened in seconds—savagely growling, as if another dog were threatening to move in on his meal, he lunged for his own tail, for his own flank, for his back foot. He whirled, a blur of snarling and slashing. It was a full-blown dogfight, the worst I had ever seen, and he was having it with himself.

That night, Buster jumped up on the bed, crawled under the covers, rested his head on the pillow like a little man,



"Guacamole is the chopped liver of Mexico."

and fell asleep. Around three o'clock, I sat up, terrified. A deep angry roar swept over my face. It was Buster, his eyes rolling, pursuing something that wasn't there. Sleeping with Buster, we soon discovered, was like sleeping with a Vietnam vet who suffers from post-traumatic-stress disorder. Demons haunted Buster's sleep. The first time we left him alone in the house, we returned half an hour later to find him panting, foaming at the mouth, licking his new, self-inflicted wounds on a sofa covered with blood. And so, almost as soon as we got Buster, we began the quest to save him.

Over the next year and a half, we had Buster's legs and spine and tail X-rayed; we had him tested for every conceivable kind of worm and fed him a hypoallergenic diet of pure venison and sweet potatoes. We consulted a chiropractor and an acupuncturist. We took him to The BodyWorks with Veronica for Alexander technique and Feldenkrais. I searched the Internet for dog behaviorists and tried spray bottles of water and jars of noisy coins, clickers, herbal remedies, even aromatherapy. I typed "self-mutilation + dog" into Google, and articles in veterinary journals about paw licking and scratching came up. If only that were the problem, I thought. I typed in "Obsessive-compulsive disorder + dog" and consulted, by e-mail and phone, vets and animal behaviorists from all over the country. We watched "Emergency Vets" on Animal Planet, hoping we'd see some clue to Buster's problems. We watched "Animal Precinct," both heartened by and envious of all the bony, beaten, scarred, one-eyed dogs who caressed the hands of strangers and frolicked tenderly with babies when given half a chance. The only thing we didn't try was a pet psychic. But sometimes, late at night, even that seemed plausible.

We couldn't leave Buster at home, but when we took him with us in the car he threw himself against the window in an attempt to attack every bicycle, motorcycle, rollerblade, and shopping cart we passed. If it rained, he tried to subdue the windshield wipers. Parking-garage attendants pulled back when one of us handed them our ticket through the window while the other hung onto the snarling cur. When we fed Buster, we had to stand with a leg on either side, touching his flanks, to reassure him, we hoped, that no one was lurking behind his tail waiting to steal his food. But when, after a while, that, too, failed, and we began feeding Buster one piece of kibble at a time, he bit the hand that fed him. He bit the hand that groomed him. He bit the hand that petted him. After each attack, he would whimper and grovel, licking our faces. If you said, "Kisses" to Buster, he would hurl himself at you to lick your face. When you whistled, he sang along, yodelling comically. He was terrified of men, especially men with hats and, embarrassingly, black men, but he was also afraid of women and children, and he hated other dogs.

Buster slept splayed companionably across your torso if you lay on the couch reading. I thought he was beautiful. He had filled out. His chest was smooth and muscular, his coat shining. When he slept on me like that, momentarily calm, I was momentarily full of hope. One day, the young woman who lived next door reached in the car window to pet him, and he lunged at her, tearing a deep gash in her hand. She was unbelievably understanding, the wound did not require stitches, there was no lawsuit. But we were frantic, and ashamed.

A new vet told us he could tell by the dog's teeth that he had had distemper when he was a puppy. Perhaps this had caused neurological damage. He couldn't be sure. But he was sure about one thing. "Your dog bites," the vet said. "Dogs that bite almost always continue to bite." Then he said, "If this were my dog, I would put him to sleep."

In the waiting room the day the vet told us to euthanize Buster, I saw an ad for a trainer in a local pet newsletter. Her name was Cinimon and she worked with rescued, hopeless, vicious pit bulls. We called her as soon as we got home.

Cinimon, a tan blonde with a pierced tongue, arrived with short-short cutoff jeans, an exposed midriff, and combat boots. She talked to us for hours, purposely ignoring Buster until he approached her, then handling him with incredible gentleness. She said we had to establish dominance over Buster now that he was in our pack. Her approach was not radical. We should put him in a crate at night and make him earn his treats by doing something, anything, even if it was as simple as sitting when told. Cinimon was full of hope and enthusiasm. I could not help seeing Cinimon, her delicious, oddly spelled name, and her own blooming California good health, as a promise of what Buster could hope for. The vet was probably right, but Buster would be the exception. Cinimon, a Valkyrie from the Valley, a girl with a household full of docile monsters, would make it so. Her training program was a reasonable behavior-modification approach. It made sense. To Cinimon. To us. Just not to Buster.

Buster was becoming a full-time job or, more precisely, a whole life. We went to bed at night worrying about him. Had he got enough exercise? Did exercise tire him out and calm him down, as it was supposed to, or did it hurt his damaged foot and stress his awkward anatomy? Would he sleep through the night, or would he wake and chase his demons and slash my calf in his confused fury? If we put him in his bed on the floor, would he fall asleep this time, or would he spin and spin and spin, tearing wildly at himself? We had an obligation to him. We had an obligation to innocent bystanders. Had we pursued every possible road to recovery? Did our umbrella insurance cover liability for dog bites? Should we put him to sleep?

In the morning, he would snuggle up and lay his head across my neck, snoring gently, his breath soft and sweet. He played in the morning, too, chasing toys and shaking them like dying rats. During the day, he snoozed, threw himself angrily against the glass doors to the front garden when the mailman walked by, threw himself angrily at his own back legs, at his long tail, at his deformed foot, at his good feet, at our feet. He sat when we told him to, looking up innocently. He was innocent: that was the most painful part. He was a vicious dog; even we would have to agree. He was destructive and dangerous, and if he had been a larger dog we would have had no choice but to put him down. But he was as innocent as a babe, baffled by his own behavior, terrified of everything that moved. He had been a lost dog. He was still a lost dog.

Then Cinimon suggested Prozac. In the months that followed, we consulted three vets, two psychopharmacologists, and a psychiatrist. We slapped peanut butter around Prozac, Buspar, Elavil, Effexor, Xanax, and Clomicalm, feeding the pills to Buster in a variety of doses and combinations. Even when they seemed to have some positive effect, it would last only a little while. Eventually, the violent behavior would return, worse than ever.

In September, we returned to New York. On the plane, the man in front of me tapped his headphones. Static? Up and down the aisle, people jiggled their headphones, wondering where the strange, ominous rumble came from. It came from under my seat, where a five-hour unilateral dogfight was taking place. At the airport, I put Buster's case on the floor while we waited for the luggage. Someone screamed. I looked back. The case was whirling across the floor, unguided, an eerie missile of snarling desperation.

There are a million or so dogs in New York City. About thirty of them live on our block on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. We have a laundromat, two dry cleaners, two churches, two dentists, a senior center, a Malaysian restaurant, a Korean market, a bakery, and a store that sells cheap leather jackets. A homeless man of regular habits lives in the doorway of the Lutheran church. He does not have a dog. But the gay men who live in the brownstone next door with their five children have two beagles. A woman down the block has a West Highland terrier, a retired champion, whom she took in when the dog's owner, a close friend, died suddenly, though she lives in one room and already had a shepherd mix named Tulip, after the heroine of J. R. Ackerley's obsessively brilliant "My Dog Tulip." There is an Afghan and an Italian greyhound with legs as spindly as pipe cleaners whose owner rides a bicycle to work. There is a blind miniature schnauzer who wobbles down the sidewalk without leash or supervision until, from a doorway, his owner hollers, "Henry!" and he totters home. There is a man who is in thrall to his young golden retriever; a three-legged yellow lab; two handsome young men with a Brussels griffon puppy; a man who lives with his mother and three tiny scruffy mutts; and a heavily tattooed window-washer with a racing bike whose shepherd mix just died. One woman who leans carefully on a cane and smiles beatifically from beneath pure-white hair gives gentle advice in a soft Irish brogue while Waldo, her Boston terrier, waits

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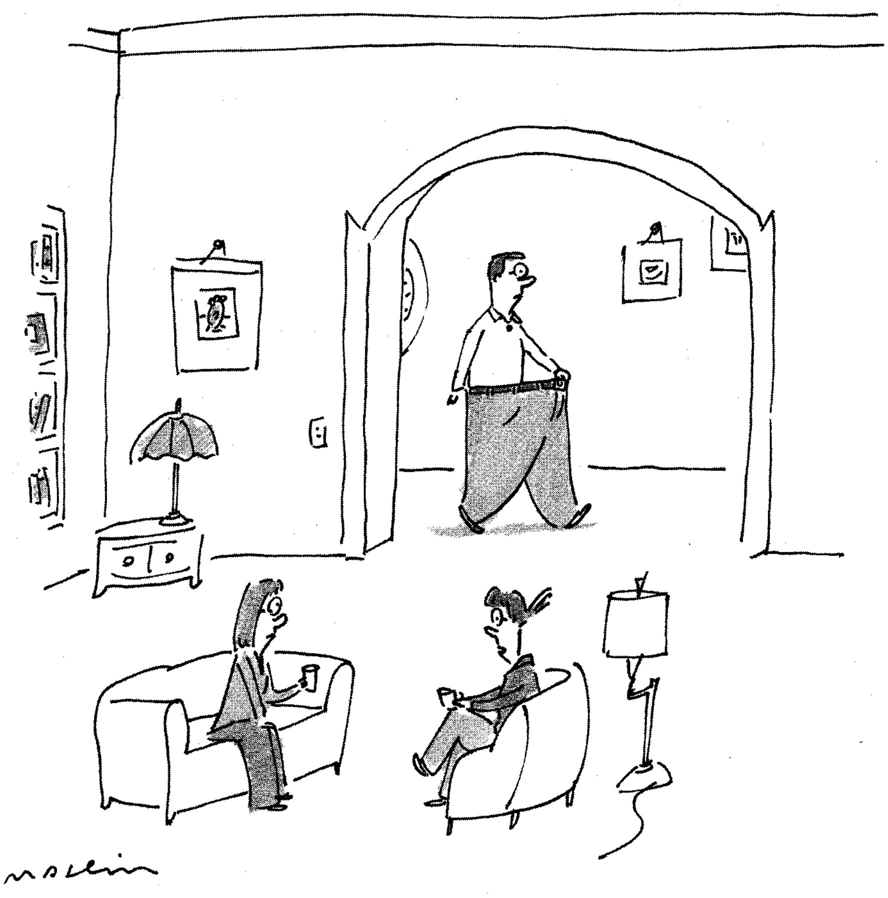
patiently, staring with his round bug eyes. And there is a woman with a warm and generous smile and a rich, cultured German accent who walks her aging Pekinese, Lord Byron, four times a day no matter how terrible the weather, a Holocaust survivor whose view of life is so beneficent I sometimes wait outside her building hoping she will materialize and provide wise counsel.

I don't know the names of all our neighbors, but I know the names of their dogs. I do not go out to dinner or to the movies with the neighbors, as I do with my friends. I don't make dates with them. I don't have to. I know I will see one or two or more of them every day. The dogs on the block gambol happily toward a puddle of urine to sniff and amplify, then sniff and be sniffed, twisting until their leashes are laced like ribbons on a Maypole. Towering above them in choking humidity or cutting wind or hushed snow, the owners say hello, comment on the humidity or the wind or the snow, discuss the latest catastrophe in the city, admire each other's animals, occasionally drop some highly personal remark about physical illness, a child, a parent, a divorce, nod sympathetically, and move on to scrape up a small, neat coil of excrement into an inside-out Fairway bag. New York City, on my block, is as small a town as Andy and Opie's Mayberry. And it was Buster who introduced me to its citizens, lunging at saintly old ladies, storming wheelchairs and strollers, his hair bristling and his teeth bared. Everyone knew him. Everyone had advice. But, mostly, everyone had sympathy. When I saw Waldo or Lord Byron coming down the street, my heart beat faster and I felt tears of gratitude forming, for their owners, women who have seen hardship and evil, would reassure me that there was hope. With patience, they said softly, there was hope.

But Buster was not getting better. We contacted an animal behaviorist recommended to us by the New York Animal Hospital. He arrived with a Snoot Loop, a contraption he was marketing that was very similar to the better known Gentle Leader, a kind of bridle with a strap that tightens around the muzzle of a dog when he pulls. He charged us hundreds of dollars, the Snoot Loop cut into Buster's nose, leaving a bloody welt, and the issue of self-mutilation was not addressed. My girlfriend, Janet, and I, outcasts everywhere but our one little block, began to argue about what to do, how to train Buster, what to feed him, when to feed him. Exhausted, discouraged, we resorted to the wisdom of our forebears, smacking the dog with a rolled-up newspaper when he attacked himself, or us. It was not effective.

One day, I took Buster to the dog run in Riverside Park near Eighty-second Street. We could let him loose there only when no other dogs were around. On this particular fall day, when the sky was a solemn gray and the leaves were dead on the ground around us, as brown as the dirt, I sat on a bench in the section reserved for small dogs and threw a hard red rubber ball for Buster. We had spent a disastrous Thanksgiving at my aunt's house in Massachusetts. Buster had come with us. Whom could we have left him with? We were assigned a bedroom, and a large sign was taped to our door warning anyone who dared to enter not to let the dog exit. The day we left, we walked out of the room, loaded down with our bags and with Buster on his leash. We had been vigilant and tense for three days and had been rewarded with a Thanksgiving free of bloodshed. There was a great flurry of relieved family hugs and kisses, my two-year-old nephew waddled bumpily toward us, squealing, Buster lunged for him, leaped back with a mouthful of soggy diaper, whimpered while my nephew wailed, and we skulked off in disgrace.

Now I sat on the park bench and watched Buster. My sister-in-law and brother were barely speaking to me. My mother thought I was disturbed. My nephew was terrified of dogs. Janet and I were squabbling. My children were disgusted. Buster chased the ball happily, brought it back, waited until I threw it again, and again, just like a normal healthy dog. With his grinning face, one ear up and one flopped jauntily over his eye, his wriggling body and wagging tail, you would never know. That was one of the problems. People saw him and rushed over, cooing and crowing, hands stretched out to pet the adorable little dog. He would stiffen,



"No, he hasn't lost any weight—he's just wearing humongous pants."

growl, bare his teeth and lunge, all in a sickening second. When someone came within five feet, I would say something. At first, I struggled with the right wording. "He's unpredictable," I said. Or, "He's afraid of strangers." Sometimes, "He's aggressive." But all of these warnings seemed to leave an opportunity for people to test whether they might be the one special person he was not afraid of or aggressive toward, the unpredicted friend. Finally, I started saying, simply, "He bites."

"He bites," I said when a young woman came into the dog run with a bichon puppy, a cottony ball who bounced around her feet. Then I got up to leash Buster and take him away. But she put the bichon on her lap and told me not to worry about it. She was benevolent, awash with the joy of a merry new puppy. I thanked her. And then I felt it coming. I tried to stop myself, but I knew I was helpless. And, as I had done so many times before to so many unsuspecting strangers, I began to tell her the tale of Buster. I could hear the high note of panic, the rhythm of hysteria and desperation in my voice. I had heard something like it at playgrounds and bus stops from parents whose children threw sand or tantrums or took drugs or shoplifted or were flunking out of school. But the pitch, the speed of the chatter, the insistence on detail—I recognized that from somewhere else, from strangers approaching me on the street to tell me their life stories: from crazy people. I listened to myself and I heard a crazy woman.

Once again, a vet, this time our New York vet, told us to put the dog to sleep. "Your dog," said Dr. Raclyn, a holistic practitioner who does not give up easily, "is deeply disturbed." One evening when I brought Buster back into the building from his walk, I bumped into one of my neighbors, Virginia Hoffmann, a dog trainer. I blurted out that the dog was miserable, we were miserable, there was no hope. Virginia, who started out as an English teacher, became a trainer after having to deal with her own unhappy puppy. She had become more and more interested, more and more skilled, until one day she quit her day job. Here was someone, I thought, who could under-

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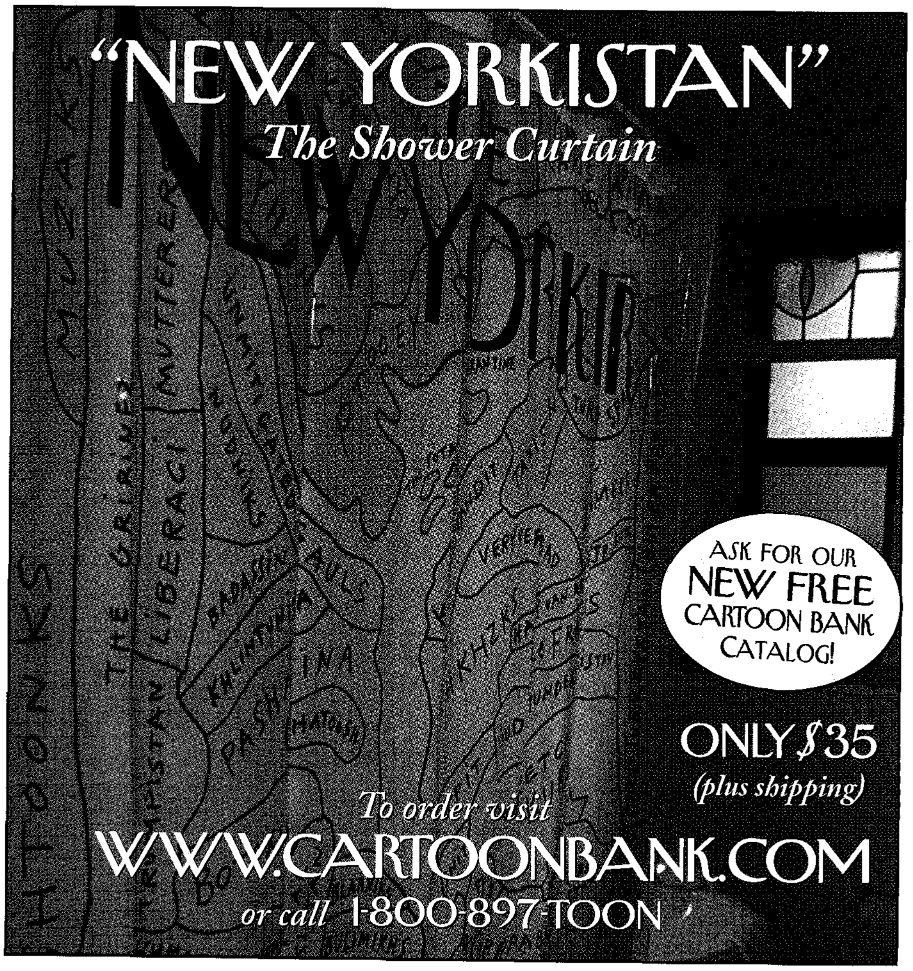

stand what we were going through. I asked her if she would help us. I wanted to give it one last try, to spend six months working seriously and consistently with Buster. He would never be sane, I recognized that. But maybe, just maybe, we could reduce the threshold of his suffering to make it bearable for him, and for us. Virginia took pity on us and agreed. She wanted to help us, she said, to help Buster, and she would learn from the experience. But she was very clear about one thing. She offered no guarantees.

OASIS

We found (like the deserting) spacious calm,
drank a pair of Arnold Palmers underneath a palm.
Went for massage and mud, lacquer, love,
overheated minerals, a stimulating rub.
Then—as if it could be used, as if for art—
I placed a grain of doubt in your open-pored heart,
and watched what had been small dilate
and everything else evaporate.

—Dana Goodyear

"I found a trainer for Buster," I said to my mother.

"Who? Clyde Beatty?"

Trim and neat, straightforward and calm, Virginia had a soothing effect on me. Perhaps she would on Buster, too. I had already considered another dog trainer who lived on the block. He had written several books and had a Catskill-comedian spiel that I found very engaging. His fee was so high that I tried one of his books first and discovered that his system required throwing things at your dog, to which approach Buster responded by attacking the suggested keys or wallet or paperback book that was launched at him, and then cowering in confusion. Another dog trainer I once ran into on the East Side told me she knew just what to do: lift Buster by the back legs and whack him across the jaw hard enough so it rattled. Then she gave me her card and walked on. I gratefully turned to Virginia, with her soft, firm voice and endless sympathy. She came three or four times a week.

Janet was in L.A. a lot then, and my day was centered on the dog. I approached him with a glove attached to a wooden spoon, rewarding him when he didn't bite it. I used toys as a reward instead of food. I let him carry his toys in his mouth when we went outside, on the theory that he would be hard-pressed to bite with his mouth full. He learned the commands "touch" and "leave it." I taught him to go to his bed, to stay, to heel, to jump through a yellow hula hoop. Clyde Beatty, indeed. All of this training had a goal—to give the dog something better to think about than his own fear. To give him confidence. To give him a better sense of his own deformed body. And to give us authority and control. I learned how to break up each task into tiny parts. We tried to get him used to wearing a muzzle, which he hated and would trigger one of his fits, by leaving it on for seconds at a time and rewarding him with a squirt of Cheese Whiz. I wished I had employed Virginia to help in child rearing. For, in addition to training, she taught me not simply to impose or demand but to observe. Virginia suggested that I keep a journal, noting the frequency and intensity of Buster's fits: the details of his misery. Which side of himself did he attack? What might have provoked it? A noise? A touch? A smell? I timed the violent fits. I noted the weather, the time of the day, his position. How long since he'd eaten? Drunk? And then I made him come to me, or stay sitting as I walked away, or jump through a hoop. Buster was a wonderful pupil, smart and willing and obedient. He was an exceptionally well-trained mad dog.

I couldn't wait until Virginia arrived for a lesson. When she walked through the door, my real day began. She brought me articles from veterinary behavioral journals. She relayed relevant anecdotes from friends and colleagues. I loved meeting Buster's big, alert dark eyes and recognizing a quick, happy understanding. Buster bit Virginia on the first visit. I had my Buster kit of butterfly bandages and Neosporin handy. Though he seemed to sense that here was someone sent to help him, he could never tolerate more than about twenty minutes of work. So the rest of the time we went over the behavior charts like sailors checking the stars.

Janet and I began going out only to places where we could take Buster with us, eating at outdoor cafés in the rain and the bitter wind. But then Buster bit the waiter at Señor Swanky's, and we stopped. We resorted to placing a large plastic collar shaped like an ice-cream cone around his neck when we left him alone. Used by vets to keep dogs from licking their wounds, the plastic cone worked more like blinkers for Buster: he was unable to see, much less bite, his hindquarters. One night, when I had brought Buster to my mother's house in Connecticut (tolerated out of motherly pity and because it was the only way she would get to see me), I put him in his collar and went to visit an old friend. Ten minutes later, my cell phone rang.

"I'm locked in my room with the door closed," my mother said. "Your dog is in the living room having a fit." She sounded terrified.

When I got home, the dog was a blur of foam and fur. I ended up wrapping him in a blanket, the only way I could get near him without being bitten, and holding him on my chest in bed for four hours, trying to soothe him while he panted and trembled. I held him and I cried.

We could no longer leave Buster in his Elizabethan collar. He had another episode that required the blanket wrapped around him, the hours of trembling and rolling eyes. Virginia pointed me to an experiment that had been done with autistic children, in which they were wrapped tightly to help them regain awareness of their own bodies. She found an unlikely product called Anxiety Wrap, a suit for dogs, which worked on the same principle. She said that really the next step would be con-

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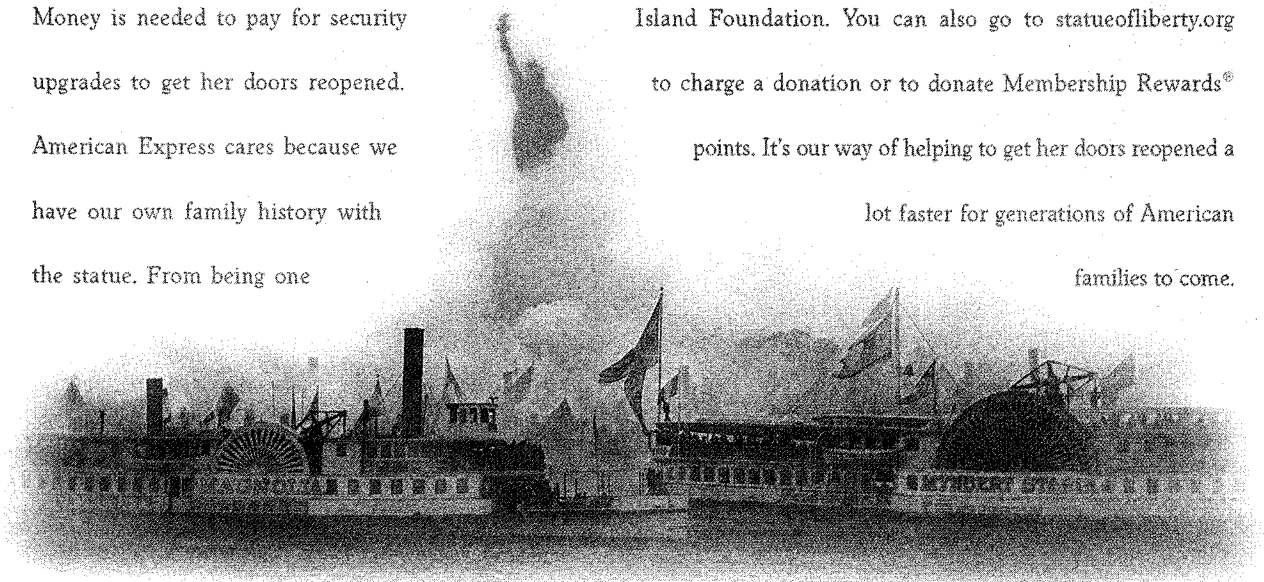

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tacting a research veterinary school and handing Buster over for brain scans and further study. "Would you be doing that for his sake?" she asked. "Or your own? That's always the hard question."

It was a good question. Buster had become an intellectual puzzle, a challenge I could not let go of. He was my companion, certainly. The intensity of his need made the bond between us urgent and powerful. And I felt a responsibility, it was true. You cannot throw away an animal because he is sick. But there was also a little pool of vanity involved, and that insistent, stubborn optimism, a cultural trait, I suppose, that demands constant improvement. I would save this dog because, in a just world, I ought to be able to save him. It was a kind of humanitarian hubris. My dog was miserable. I insisted he get better.

We euthanized Buster eighteen months after we'd got him. We petted him as he stood on the vet's stainless-steel examining table. He wagged his tail and licked our hands. After giving him an IV dose of valium, Dr. Raclyn added sodium pentobarbitol. Buster turned on him with one last snarl, looked back at us, wagged his tail again, crumpled into our arms, and was gone.

It took six months before we had either the heart or the courage to do it, but we decided to get another dog, a puppy this time. We searched Internet rescue sites and visited the A.S.P.C.A., the city pound, and the North Shore Animal League. There were enormous, sad-eyed shepherd mixes and venerable poodle mixes and hopeful bull-terrier mixes. Lab mixes leaped and whippet mixes shivered. We should have taken them all. We should have taken every puppy, too, although their fat, gigantic paws foretold their gigantic futures. What we couldn't find was a puppy who would stay small enough for our bicoastal commute. Sometimes we took Virginia with us to guide us, to protect us from falling under the spell of another charismatic but impossible dog. All the best, sweetest dogs we know are rescued dogs; nevertheless—a little guiltily, a little nervously—we drove to Frederick, Maryland, and picked up a tiny ten-week-old Cairn terrier. We named him Hector. A few months later, on the coldest morning of the coldest winter in decades, I took Hector to Central Park. There was smooth, slick snow on the ground. We made our way to Hearnshead Rock, a scenic jog of boulders rolling out into the lake. In spring, deep-yellow irises rise up there. In winter, the cove lets ducks and swans escape the wind. On this dark, achingly cold morning, the lake was almost completely frozen. The silver ice and the silver sky were cut in two by the skyline, and only in the crook of the rocks, where hundreds of ducks swam in circles, had the gray water been prevented from freezing. There were buffleheads and scoters and coots and even a wood duck. There was a great blue heron standing, not a foot from shore, as still as the black trees. The dog and I had been watching this tableau for twenty minutes or so when suddenly the heron shot his head into the shallow water, then snapped his neck back into its looping posture, a large fish dangling from his beak. He swallowed it. We watched the fish, a protrusion inching slowly down the bird's elegant throat, and then we walked home through silent woods, catching each other's eye now and then, checking in, companionable and intimate, sharing the exhilarating quiet. Hector, trotting beside me in the snow, was, like Buster, just a dog. And if, at that moment, I didn't know exactly how to explain why people want to own dogs, with all the inconvenience and heartache attached, I felt that here, at least, was a clue.

Hector prances along the street Buster skulked, greeting neighbors and strangers and men in hats and toddlers in snowsuits. He loves everyone and everyone loves him. I often think of Buster, and it breaks my heart. People say, "You did everything you could." But did we? What about Phenobarbital, even though every vet recommended against it? What about the autism suit? We should have moved to the country or sent him to the man in San Diego who leads a pack of dogs through the hills. What *about* the pet psychic? Then Hector pounces on an empty forty-ounce Budweiser can, almost as big as he is, and carries it proudly home. He kisses babies like a politician. He comes in peace. ♦

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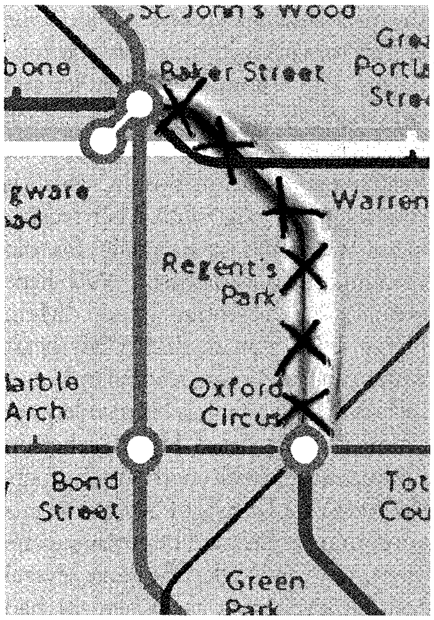
SHOUTS & MURMURS

AN APPENDECTOMY ON THE BAKERLOO LINE

BY GRAHAM CHAPMAN

Dear Sirs,

I've had letter after letter after letter since you published one particular query that asked, "What should I do about my appendix on the Bakerloo Line?" Well, "Miss N.," I can only assume you're talking about an acutely inflamed vermiform appendix. The answer is simply: Take it out! I've no wish to give glib advice. I know, there are bound to be difficulties for the inexperienced layman or -woman contemplating auto-appendectomy. One tiny hint here: have a good rummage through your handbag and make sure your Lane's forceps are not caked with biscuit crumbs, bits of fluff, old bus tickets, etc. It could save an awful lot of fuss later on. I have set out some details that may help you in this sometimes irksome chore.



First, find yourself a Tube Map, issued free by London Transport, or go to your nearest Underground station and ask for one. Remember, the stations marked with an "O" are interchange stations. Stations marked with a star are closed on Sundays, and also remember to pick up a plastic bucket for the guts.

Then study your map and find the brown line clearly marked "Bakerloo" in the key. Select a station appropriate to the severity of the inflammation. For mild or grumbling appendicitis, you could start at Lambeth North—being careful not to change at Waterloo—and have comfortably incised your abdomen and exposed the inflamed organ by the time you are between Marylebone and Kilburn Park. You will then have the time it takes you to reach Willesden Junction to complete the excision. And the six minutes between there and Wembley Central gives you plenty of time to be completely sewn up before the terminal at Harrow & Wealdstone—a very unpleasant place to be with a gaping abdominal wound and a plastic bucket full of smelly viscera.

Points to remember. One: If you are at all uncertain, ask the ticket inspectors about gridiron incisions. They are fully trained public servants and are most helpful. Two: The Bakerloo Line stops running at midnight. And three: For severe inflammation, consult the London Transport Information Center and choose one of their longer journeys, arranging your trip so that the actual excision of the inflamed viscus takes place somewhere along the length of the Bakerloo Line, while utilizing additional travel—say, a spell on the Piccadilly Line, or taking the shuttle up and down the Victoria Line—for any pre- and postoperative procedures.

Finally, a few words of warning. Whatever you do, remain calm. Do not throw used swabs onto the floor of the train, as these can cause delay or prevent the automatic doors from closing. Also, a purse-string suture should be inserted into the *caput caeci* about half an inch from the base, and failure to surrender a valid ticket at the end of the journey could mean a fine of up to ten pounds for a first offense. Finally, Morant Baker forceps are not for sale at the tobacconists found in larger stations.

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BY CHARLES MICHENER

Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, photographed by Richard Avedon, October 1, 2003.

We are living, operatically speaking, in what might be called the Age of the Seconda Donna. During most of the four hundred years since opera originated in the Italian courts at the turn of the sixteenth century, the commanding singers have been prima donnas—sopranos who take on the roles of tragic heroines and, in many cases, make it a point to be as difficult as possible offstage. Attention is still automatically paid to the Violettas, Lucias, Toscas, Brünnhildes, Salomes, and various Leonoras, but recently an intrepid group of women—mezzo-sopranos, who are generally cast in supporting roles, and often as men—have created a brilliant, in many ways more interesting place for the spotlight to fall. Cecilia Bartoli fills concert halls with esoterica by Vivaldi, Gluck, and Salieri. Anne-Sofie von Otter has taken the songs of Grieg, Stenhammar, and Sibelius out of the Nordic mists. Olga Borodina has been the most powerful female voice in the Kirov Opera's resurrection of nineteenth-century Russian epics. Susan Graham has made a brilliant success by exploring recherché corners of the French art song. And in the great, ongoing revival of Baroque operas and oratorios, many of them by Handel, the most luminous presence has been that of the American mezzo-soprano Lorraine Hunt Lieberson.

None of these women have followed a conventional career path, but Hunt Lieberson is the arch-maverick. She has never had a long-term relationship with a recording label, and she has never had a press agent. Most of her opera appearances have been well outside the big arenas, in festivals devoted to close-knit ensemble performances and to innovative staging. (She has sung in only two productions at the Met—John Harbison's "The Great Gatsby," in 1999, and Berlioz's "The Trojans," last season, in which she made a notable success as Dido.) She prefers to work with directors and musicians with whom she is familiar and who share her spirit of adventure—small repertory groups like the Orchestra of Emmanuel Music, in Boston, which is conducted by Craig Smith. Their recording of two sacred Bach cantatas for solo voice and chamber orchestra—"Ich habe genug" ("I have enough") and "Mein Herze schwimmt im Blut" ("My heart swims in blood")—was released by Nonesuch this fall, and it has been widely acclaimed. I first heard Hunt Lieberson twelve years ago with another such group, the New York Festival of Song, at a benefit evening in Leonard Bernstein's apartment, in New York. She sang several Spanish love songs, and when she had finished I went up to her and said, "You have one of the most beautiful voices I've ever heard. Who are you?"

"I'm a violist," she replied, with the trace of a smile.

Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, who was known as Lorraine Hunt until her marriage four years ago to the composer Peter Lieberson, is forty-nine. She did not begin singing in earnest until the relatively late age of twenty-six, and before that she supported herself as a freelance violist. Craig Smith, whom she has known since her student days at the Boston Conservatory, in the early nineteen-eighties, told me that he regards her training on an instrument that has generally played second fiddle to the violin as the key to what makes her so special as a singer. "A viola is a middle voice—it has to be alert to everything around it," he said recently. "There's something viola-like about the rich graininess of her singing, about her ability to sound a tone from nothing—there's no sudden switching on of the voice, no *click*. And, like most violists, she is also self-effacing: without vanity as a singer. When we first performed the Bach cantatas, she just disappeared as a person."

Two years ago, Hunt Lieberson sang the Bach cantatas in a monodrama staged by the iconoclastic director Peter Sellars, with whom she has collaborated on many projects over the years. For "Ich habe genug," she wore the hospital garb—complete with medical tubes—of a woman who is terminally ill. At one point during "Mein Herze," she was wrapped in a red sash that evoked a remorseful sinner's torment. She dedicated the performances to the memory of her younger sister Alexis, who had died the previous year of cancer. (Shortly before her sister's death, Hunt Lieberson herself had been diagnosed with breast cancer.) Many Bach purists in the audience protested that her voice alone would have been sufficient to serve the music and its theme of redemption through suffering. Others found the performances almost unbearably moving, as much for the beauty of the singing as for the intense conviction with which she conveyed the agony of suffering and, eventually, the ecstasy of spiritual release.

Hunt Lieberson told me that for her the staging and the singing were "inseparable," and on the recording she seems almost visibly present. The opening aria of the first cantata is a kind of call-and-response for oboe d'amore and voice, and the reed instrument's plaintive, slightly distant timbre is the perfect foil for the singer's intimate, darkly gleaming mezzo, which has a vitality beyond the capacity of any wind player. With many singers of comparable virtuosity, one hears the words as something of an afterthought; musical ravishment comes before dramatic sense. With Hunt Lieberson, the two are joined, so that the sentiment of the words—by turns yearning, reflective, and joyous—gives the vocal line its urgency and its shape, each note a specific emotional character in the gentle undertow of Bach.

In the second cantata's first aria, the four words of the opening line seem, literally, to pry open Hunt Lieberson's throat as she sings: "Stumme Seufzer, stille Klagen" ("Mute sighs, silent cries"). Although the cantatas were written to celebrate certain Sundays and Feast Days in the Lutheran liturgical calendar, they are also deeply private effusions that require the singer to be expressive without sounding rhetorical. Hunt Lieberson displays no sense of self-consciousness, no striving for artistic effect. Like the best pop and jazz vocalists—Billie Holiday, Patsy Cline, Joni Mitchell (whom Hunt Lieberson reveres)—she seems artless, creating an atmosphere so enveloping that the listener may feel like the only other person in the world, transported to a place beyond mere words and music.

Hunt Lieberson and her husband live in the hills above Santa Fe, in an adobe-style house with a spectacular view down a long valley toward the city. When I visited there recently, she came out to greet me, preceded by a large brown-and-white dog who ran over to the car and nuzzled my leg as I got out. He was a friendly stray that they had adopted, she explained. Hunt Lieberson is a handsome, wholesome-looking woman, with an open manner that betrays her upbringing as a California girl. As we walked into the house, she spoke about how she had been drawn to this austere, arid place more than two years earlier. "I'm a Pisces," she said. "This is a fire landscape, and fire landscapes need water."

The house was airy and uncluttered, and Hunt Lieberson led me on a tour, pointing out a shelf of family photographs, including one that showed her at her first piano recital, when she was six or seven, a pretty girl with long, blond curls and a timid smile. One room contained a shrine belonging to her husband, who practices Tibetan Buddhism. He was across the hall, with the door closed, orchestrating a new piano concerto that the Minnesota Orchestra was to perform in a few weeks. He came out briefly, chatted about the symbolism of the objects in the shrine, and went back to work on his concerto.

Hunt Lieberson had just returned home after a demanding period of work. She had spent August in England, at the Glyndebourne Festival, where she performed in a revival of Peter Sellars's production of Handel's oratorio "Theodora." Then, in September, at the London Proms, she sang the title role in Britten's dramatic solo cantata "Phaedra," and Jocasta in Stravinsky's "Oedipus Rex." "Two suicides in one night!" she said, with a laugh. "That's right up my alley."

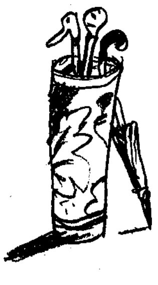
We sat in her kitchen, and she spoke about growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her father taught music in local high schools and, later, at a junior college, and he also organized and conducted community performances of operas, oratorios, and "lots of Gilbert and Sullivan." Her mother—"a natural actress with a warm contralto"—was a prominent local soloist who became a voice teacher. Lorraine's childhood was dominated by her father. "He was very controlling and, at the same time, he couldn't seem to control his own anger," she said. "He was single-minded in his desire to develop my gifts. I was the first child, the eldest of four, and he started me very early at the piano and then the violin. He made me practice everything excruciatingly slowly so that there wouldn't be any mistakes. Mistakes were not a natural phenomenon in our house. I was so directed by my father that it took many years to even begin to find my own voice. But it was partly because of this upbringing that I came to care so deeply about *genuine* expression."

She acknowledged that she shares her father's tendency to control things. "I was very shy, a good swimmer, and a bright, model student," she said, "but there was definitely a fiery temperament there, too. Saturdays were spent mostly with private lessons, so I didn't get to go to a lot of birthday parties, but there was one party I've never forgotten. A parent put a waltz on, and the kids began dancing. For some reason, I tried to choreograph everyone, and I got really high-powered about it. Finally, the birthday girl's mother took me aside and said gently, 'Maybe you should let everybody just do what they want.' It was a terrible moment of self-awareness."

There were also intensely pleasurable moments of self-expression. "When no one was around," she said, "I would put on the record player and dance by myself. During the 'Grand Canyon Suite,' I wrapped myself in the living-room curtains to dramatize a storm. One of my favorite records was a Harry Belafonte album. I had no idea where the music came from—nobody told me it was Caribbean. It was just incredibly primal. A song like 'Dolly Dawn' touched a gut feeling. It was scary and exhilarating at the same time."

When she was about twelve, she switched from the violin to the viola. "It suited me better," she said. "I wasn't very ambitious at the time, and I liked being the inner voice in a group." She began playing in a youth orchestra, and at high school, in Orinda, sang in the chorus. Her first solo was in Vivaldi's "Gloria." In her junior year, she transferred to Berkeley High School. "They had an amazing music program—an orchestra and three choirs," she said. "I sang solos in Mozart's C-Minor Mass and had a wonderful time as Golde in 'Fiddler on the Roof.'" During our interviews, Hunt Lieberson occasionally broke into song—not to illustrate a point but simply to embellish the conversation with a little music. Now the memory of that high-school performance prompted her to sing the opening measures of "Do You Love Me? Do I What?" in a seductive Yiddish accent.

She went on to San Jose State, as a double major in voice and viola studies, paying her tuition from earnings she made as a violist in the San Jose Symphony. Although she was cast as Mother Marie in a student production of Poulenc's "Dialogues of the Carmelites," she was so busy as a freelance violist that she dropped her voice studies. "I didn't feel close to opera," she said, "particularly since my father had made me sit and listen to the Met's Saturday-afternoon broadcasts, sometimes with a score on my lap. Between that and the bad radio reception and some of the wobbly singers, I was mostly turned off. But Puccini's 'Suor Angelica' always made me cry, and it still does."



After college, she fell in love with a "more worldly" young man who played jazz guitar, and the two of them had a lounge act in Los Gatos. "He played the guitar, and I sang and played the viola," she said. "We did standards, stuff by Chicago, Joni Mitchell, Stevie Wonder, Jobim. I had no far-reaching goals. I just enjoyed singing the songs and playing."

She and some friends formed a quartet that specialized in contemporary music. The group's name, Novaj Kordoj—Esperanto for "new strings"—was suggested by the Bay Area composer Lou Harrison. "We were all so busy," Hunt Lieberson said, "that the only time we had to rehearse a new piece, like George Crumb's 'Black Angels,' was at seven-thirty in the morning." When her boyfriend was arrested in Mexico for buying marijuana, she visited him at a minimum-security jail in Mazatlán. She joined a group of women who bribed the officials so that they could move in with their husbands and boyfriends in shacks they helped put up on the prison grounds. "Those were really formative years," she said. "I was learning all that music, and I was learning about love. I also had a kind of spiritual awakening after reading 'Autobiography of a Yogi,' by Paramahansa Yogananda. The story of his spiritual journey set off sparks of recognition. Things were lighting up."

In the late seventies, she became the principal violist in the Berkeley Free Orchestra, conducted by Kent Nagano. Someone came up with the idea of organizing a performance of "Hänsel and Gretel" for the prisoners in San Quentin, and she volunteered for the part of Hänsel. "It was my first serious singing in six years," she said. "I found a short-haired wig at a Goodwill store, and I put on a pair of ripped pants and a big flannel shirt, because I couldn't figure out how to flatten my boobs. The place was pretty scary. Afterward, I took my wig off and let my hair down. Walking through the yard, I heard one inmate say to another, 'Shit! I thought that was a dude with a big ass!'"

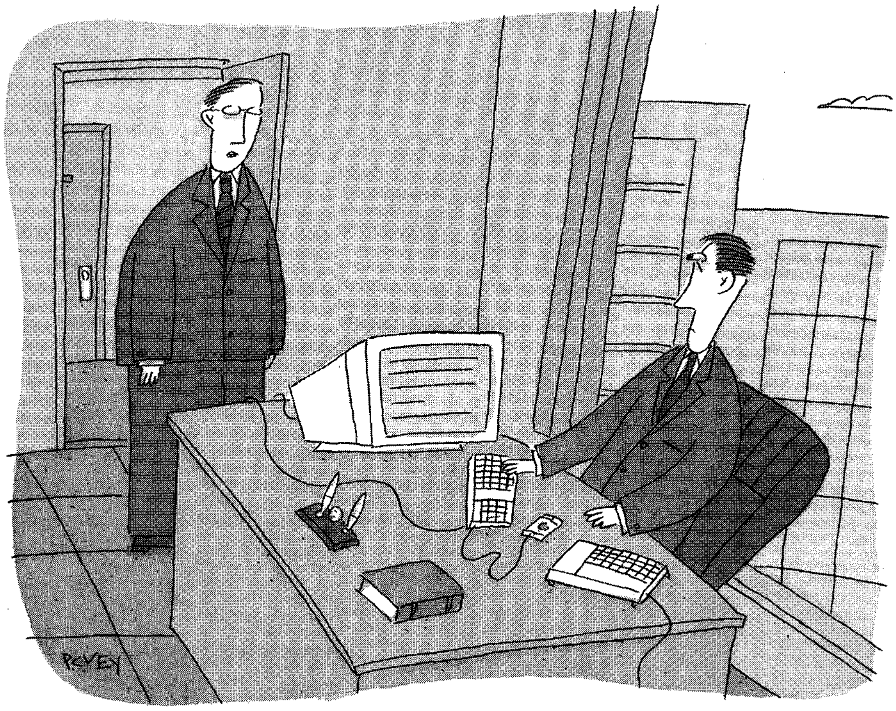
By then, Hunt Lieberson had broken up with the jazz guitarist, and she met a French-horn player in the Vancouver Symphony. When he landed a job with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, she moved East with him. "I went to Boston with the intention of freelancing on the viola," she said, "and finding a voice teacher on the side."

Hunt Lieberson began her vocal studies in a category—that of lyric soprano—in which she was not completely comfortable. After an unsuccessful audition for the Juilliard School, she was accepted into the opera program at the Boston Conservatory. She continued to freelance as a violist, and one of her gigs was with the orchestra at Emmanuel Church, in Back Bay, which had a substantial music program under Craig Smith. "From the very beginning," Smith told me, "it was clear that she was an incredible musician—no one came to rehearsal better prepared."

In the early eighties, Peter Sellars had made the Boston area a mecca for enterprising operagoers with his radically updated productions of Handel ("Orlando" set at the Kennedy Space Center, for instance). Sellars and Smith were looking for someone to sing Sesto, the vengeance-crazed son of Pompey, in a new staging of "Julius Caesar," and Smith suggested Lorraine Hunt. The audition took place in his office, and, as Sellars later remembered it, "She started singing, and you were in the middle of this raging forest fire. Certain things were a *little* out of control, but what you got was sheer power, sheer concentrated energy."

Hunt Lieberson's portrayal of Sesto, in 1985 at the PepsiCo Summerfare festival, in Purchase, New York, was her breakthrough performance. Sellars had transported Handel's Egypt of 48 B.C. to a present-day, ersatz Middle East setting and, in a prescient touch, transformed Sesto into something resembling an Uzi-toting terrorist. Today, the conceit, viewed on a laser-disk recording of a performance that was given five years later, in Dresden, seems more than a little forced and, at times, sophomoric. But not when Sesto is onstage. As the boy searches for the killer of his father, he is in constant, almost deranged motion, both vocally and physically. Yet Hunt Lieberson's fix on his single-minded rage is so strong that whenever she is singing the wackiness drops away.

Stephen Wadsworth, another director with whom Hunt Lieberson feels a close affinity, saw the production in Purchase. He recalled his first impression of her in *Opera News*, in 1996: "She went at the role of Sesto hammer and tongs. . . . She sang with a sort of raw abandon, honoring all at once Sellars's distinctive choreography of torment, Handel's music, and Sesto's own private hell. She was absolutely in the moment. Everyone in New York wanted to know who she was."



"They're going to clean up all the graffiti in the men's room tomorrow. Want to get in one last obscenity?"

The countertenor Drew Minter, who sang Ptolemy, credits Sellars with spotting the paradox that audiences find so thrilling in Hunt Lieberson: "He recognized her elemental, grounded quality, and at the same time he encouraged her wild freedom." Peggy Pearson, the superlative oboist on the recent recording of the Bach cantatas, played in the orchestra of that production of "Julius Caesar," and she remembers the emotional impact the performances had on the singer. "Many times when Lorraine came offstage," Pearson said, "she was in tears."

"After that," Hunt Lieberson told me, "the singing took over. The final sign was in 1988, when I came home from a Thanksgiving weekend and discovered that my viola had been stolen. I had asked friends to feed the cat, and one of them had left the key in the mailbox. The burglar's calling card was a cigarette butt snuffed out on the rug. I had had the viola for more than a decade, and of course I was terribly upset. Even more upsetting was the fact that I had let the insurance run out, and I couldn't afford to buy another one. I told the police and checked all the pawnshops, but the viola never turned up. I still think about it, especially when I go to a concert and hear something that I used to play and love. I always think that one day, when I can't sing anymore, I'll take up the viola again—if my fingers can still move."

The next decade was immensely productive. With the conductor Nicholas McGegan and the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, Hunt Lieberson participated in a series of Handel opera and oratorio recordings on Harmonia Mundi—among them "Susanna," "Theodora," "Ariodante," and "Messiah." Critics compared her blazing directness on an album of Handel arias to that of the great English mezzo Janet Baker. (The tragic waters that Hunt Lieberson stirs in her rendition of "He Was Despised," from "Messiah," make Baker's celebrated version sound almost stolid.)

She deepened her collaboration with Sellars, notably with a Donna Elvira in "Don Giovanni," in 1987, that turned a character who can seem a tiresome whine into a harrowing, haunted figure. Nine years later, she sang the role of the gravely impassioned Irene, a leader of persecuted early Christians, in Sellars's "Theodora," at Glyndebourne. Her magnificent Act III invocation "Lord, to Thee each Night and Day," as seen on a tape released by Kultur, has the visionary quality of Falconetti as St. Joan in Carl Dreyer's silent movie "The Passion of Joan of Arc," which many film buffs regard as the ultimate cinematic performance. She worked extensively with the Mark Morris Dance Group, singing in the premières of two of the choreographer's masterpieces, Purcell's "Dido and Aeneas" and Handel's "L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato." In a piece in this magazine, Joan Acocella wrote that she sang "Erlkönig," in Morris's "Bedtime," a setting of Schubert songs, as though it were a "national emergency." In 1993, she triumphed in Paris (and later at the Brooklyn Academy of Music) as the heroine of what may be the most extravagantly splendid of French Baroque operas, Charpentier's "Médée," with Les Arts Florissants, conducted by William Christie. The following year, she sang the title role in a production of "Carmen" at the Boston Lyric Opera—a performance that is remembered by the relatively few who saw it as one of the most riveting Carmens of our time.

She was forty-five when she made her Met début, in 1999, as Myrtle Wilson, the mistress of Tom Buchanan, in "The Great Gatsby." John Harbison wrote the part of Myrtle specially for Hunt Lieberson, and in two juicy scenes she gave the opera a complexity and an earthiness that it otherwise lacked. Last February, she had her biggest operatic triumph in New York, with a performance of Dido in "The Trojans" that had critics grasping at synonyms for "noble" and "luminous."

"Artistically, the nineties were wonderful," she told me. "Personally, they were somewhat tortured." In 1988, she had started living with a composer. The relationship broke up three years later, when she discovered that he was seeing other women. "It was shattering," she said. "And at some point the stress of work and life damaged my immune system. I had insomnia. I would get these respiratory infections and end up singing while I was sick, which, of course, depleted me even more. But I had a lot of good life-saving therapy, and when I met Peter, in 1997, I was content with myself. Of course, finding your heartmate is a really good boost to your immune system."

Peter Lieberson had never heard of

Lorraine Hunt before Stephen Wadsworth sent him a tape of her voice, in 1996. They were considering what voices would be right for various roles in Lieberson's first opera, "Ashoka's Dream," for the Santa Fe Opera. "Ashoka's Dream" is based on the life of an emperor of India in the third century B.C. who renounced brutality after converting to Buddhism. Wadsworth thought that Hunt might be ideal for the part of Ashoka's second wife, Triraksha. Peter Lieberson, who is the son of Goddard Lieberson, the longtime head of Columbia Records, and Vera Zorina, a stage and film actress of the nineteen-thirties and forties, a noted ballerina, and a former wife of George Balanchine, had grown up at the pinnacle of artistic life in New York. He had become a practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism during his graduate-student days at Columbia. Years later, he moved with his wife and three daughters to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where he became the director of the Shambhala training and meditation program.

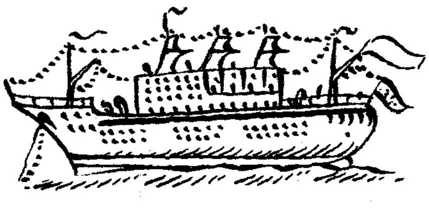
"I told Peter that Lorraine was very picky about what she takes on," Wadsworth recalled. "Peter listened to the tape of her voice and said, 'She's so beautiful!' He called her up, and after the two talked for an hour, Lorraine called me and said, 'He's so attractive!' And they had only heard each other's voice!" The attraction blossomed during the opera's run, and, after a difficult period of family separation and divorce, they were married, and she joined her name to his. ("If his name had been Jones, I wouldn't have added it," she told me, laughing.)

"During Lorraine's performances, I often find myself in the role of what in Tibetan is called a *kusung*," Peter Lieberson said to me. "It refers to a person who protects the body of a teacher. The *kusung* has to be awake to everything about the teacher—to the temperature of the environment. Lorraine is a true performer, which I'm not, and she gets a lot of energy from being onstage. One reason she's so compelling is that she's completely synchronized. Her voice, the movements of her body—her *intention*—are all of a piece. Many artists try to graft that genuineness onto a performance, but, with Lorraine, it's a way of being. There is, of course, a tremendous amount of stress involved. The greater the escalation of appreciation for what she does, the more pressure she's under to meet the public's expectations."

Drew Minter remembers that his old friend suffered a recurrence of insomnia the night before she was to give the Saturday matinée broadcast performance of "The Trojans" at the Met. "She got absolutely no sleep, and the next morning she was wired," he said. "She agonized over whether to have the singer who was covering for her put on call, but then she decided not to set off an alarm. She went out and gave one of her best Didos. It was awesome—she just *sang* into the fatigue. If she's coming at it from a place of vulnerability, she doesn't try to cover up—she uses it. She always connects from where she is."

On occasion, Hunt Lieberson's artistic focus has been so intense that it strikes terror in her colleagues. Stephen Wadsworth remembers a matinée of "Xerxes" at City Opera during which the orchestra's tempo in her final aria wasn't exactly what she wanted. "She went into such a rage that she started rocketing upstage and downstage and singing like a woman possessed," Wadsworth said. "I thought she was going to knock down the set. Afterward, George Manahan"—the conductor—"said, 'Boy, she can be really scary!' "

This fall, I watched Hunt Lieberson prepare for Debussy's "Pelléas et Mélisande," an opera she was tackling for the first time. She was to give three concert performances as Mélisande, with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, in Boston and New York. Two weeks before the first performance, I met her in the New York apartment of the French vocal coach Denise Massé, with whom she had worked on "The Trojans." Mélisande is one of the most challenging heroines in opera—a girl/woman/siren/victim, with a troubled but obscure personal history, who expresses herself mostly in brief outbursts. Hunt Lieberson remarked that Debussy had begged his cast to "please forget that you are singers," and Massé replied, "Yes, but you must also never lose the core vibration of your voice." Over the next several hours, the two women spent as much time discussing the enigma of Mélisande as they did the nuances involved in bringing her to life. Was she a runaway victim from Bluebeard's castle, as some scholars have suggested? "Hmm, I'll have to think about that," Hunt Lieberson said. Was she a hopeless liar? "For her, it's a matter of survival." Should the singer flip the French "r"s or sing them as one would say them? "I like the naturalness of singing the way one speaks," Hunt Lieberson said. Massé convinced her that a flipped "r" would carry better in a big hall. Afterward, Massé said, "Lorraine is like Callas in her determination to dig as deeply as possible into the character—to find all the grain in the wood."



A few days later, Hunt Lieberson worked with her voice teacher, Herbert Burtis, in his studio in southwestern Massachusetts. As she warmed up with a series of scales, I noticed how she opened up her whole body, bending slightly at the knees and spreading her arms, to create a sound that seemed to travel from the bottom of her feet straight up through her head. She spent five minutes on Mélisande's first, extremely rapid utterance—"*Ne me touchez pas! Ne me touchez pas!*"—in order to give each vowel the appropriate terrified resonance. "I know you're supposed to be emotionally frail," Burtis told her, "but you don't want to sound *vocally* frail. Make sure you know where the vowel is going to sound in your head before you sing the consonant so that the consonant doesn't detract from the sound." She applied herself to the challenge, and as they went through the score, repeating phrase after phrase, the words and the music seemed to come together with an ever greater presence that filled the studio.

The next day, she travelled to Boston for three full days of rehearsals in Symphony Hall with the Boston Symphony Orchestra and a superb cast of international soloists, conducted by Bernard Haitink. As I listened through all the starting and the stopping at one of the sessions, she seemed to be the only still point onstage, going deeper and deeper into the personality of the mysterious character in a way that recalled what Mary Garden, the first Mélisande, described when she first heard Debussy play the score on the piano, before the opera's première, in 1902. "Listening to that music," Garden wrote, "I seemed to become someone else, someone inside of me whose language and soul were akin to mine."

Hunt Lieberson sang her first Mélisande on an evening when many listeners in Symphony Hall left before the end, apparently more anxious about the outcome of the deciding game between the Red Sox and the Yankees for the American League championship than they were about the consequences of Mélisande's illicit love for Pelléas. That night, her Mélisande was suggestively alive. Four nights later, in Carnegie Hall, her performance seemed even more richly filled out. Backstage, she was clearly elated and was full of praise for her colleagues—especially Haitink, for bringing out the score's "heartbreaking" qualities. When I complimented her on how beautiful she looked in an off-white dress with a lacy, beaded top, she laughed and said, "I got it at a Latino store in Boston six years ago. It cost ninety-nine dollars."

A few weeks ago, Hunt Lieberson gave a recital with the pianist Peter Serkin at Jordan Hall, in Boston, performing a program that she was to bring a week later to Zankel Hall, in New York. Because of a winter storm that dumped nearly two feet of snow on the city within twenty-four hours, there were many empty seats in the auditorium when she and Serkin walked onstage, but she showed no signs of dismay as she took her place in front of the piano. After the applause ended, she stood perfectly still, her eyes cast down, holding the room in silence. Finally, she raised her head, and when the opening sentiment of Brahms's "Unbewegte laue Luft"—"Motionless balmy air, deep calm of nature"—emerged, it seemed as though she had already begun to sing, long before we heard her.

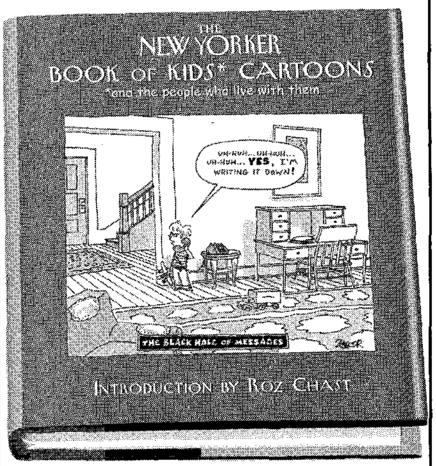
Over the next two hours, Hunt Lieberson demonstrated the full range of her powers in a program with wildly disparate musical styles and moods that were unified by her unflagging conviction. She followed the sombre nineteenth-century Romanticism of three Brahms songs with excerpts from Handel's Baroque cantata "La Lucrezia," in which the violated heroine vows vengeance with hell-raising ferocity. When she called on the gods to punish the Roman who raped her—"*Incontri larve, ruine aspetti*" ("May he meet only with worms and ruins")—the intensity of her pathos and rage became almost unbearable. From there, she entered the Impressionist world of Debussy's "Chansons de Bilitis," three songs that describe the wonder and the sadness of a young woman's sexual awakening. After the intermission, she sang "Rilke Songs," settings of five of the poet's "Sonnets to Orpheus," which were composed for her by her husband. The songs, by turns rapt, erotic, and fierce, could be heard as a portrait of an intensely complementary marriage, the delicately spiky piano writing urging the singer into one voluptuous passage after another. The composer's choice of texts pointed up his wife's strengths, especially in the final song, when the poet enjoins his muse, "And if the earthly has forgotten you, / Whisper to the silent earth: I flow. / To the rushing water say: I am."

Hunt Lieberson closed the program with three songs by Mozart, including "Abendempfindung" ("Evening Thoughts"), a conventionally sentimental song that she elevated to a place of grave sorrow, and a Masonic cantata, "You who honor the Creator of the Infinite Universe," in which she turned a didactic plea for universal brotherhood into a declaration of radiant optimism. She took the humanitarian theme to a more personal level in her encores: Schumann's "Widmung" ("Dedication"), an anthem of love to his wife, Clara; the spiritual "Deep River"; and "Vedrai, carino," from "Don Giovanni," which she introduced as one of her favorite Mozart arias. After explaining that Zerlina sings it to soothe her husband, Masetto, who has been beaten up by the Don, she gave her own translation of the text: "What a wonderful remedy I am going to give you. It's all natural, and the pharmaceutical companies don't know how to make it." She placed her hand over her heart, paused, and choked up. "Feel it beating," she went on. "Touch me here." Zerlina's aria is usually sung as a coy invitation to conjugal coupling. Hunt Lieberson transformed it into an infinitely tender lullaby. ♦

DEPT. OF CLARIFICATION

From the Missoula (Mont.) Missoulian.

The Paul F. Knox who was arrested last October and charged with running a methamphetamine lab in St. Regis is not the Paul Knox from Alberton who shoes horses.


THE NEW YORKER
BOOK OF KIDS' CARTOONS
and the people who live with them
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THE BLACK HOLE OF MESSAGES
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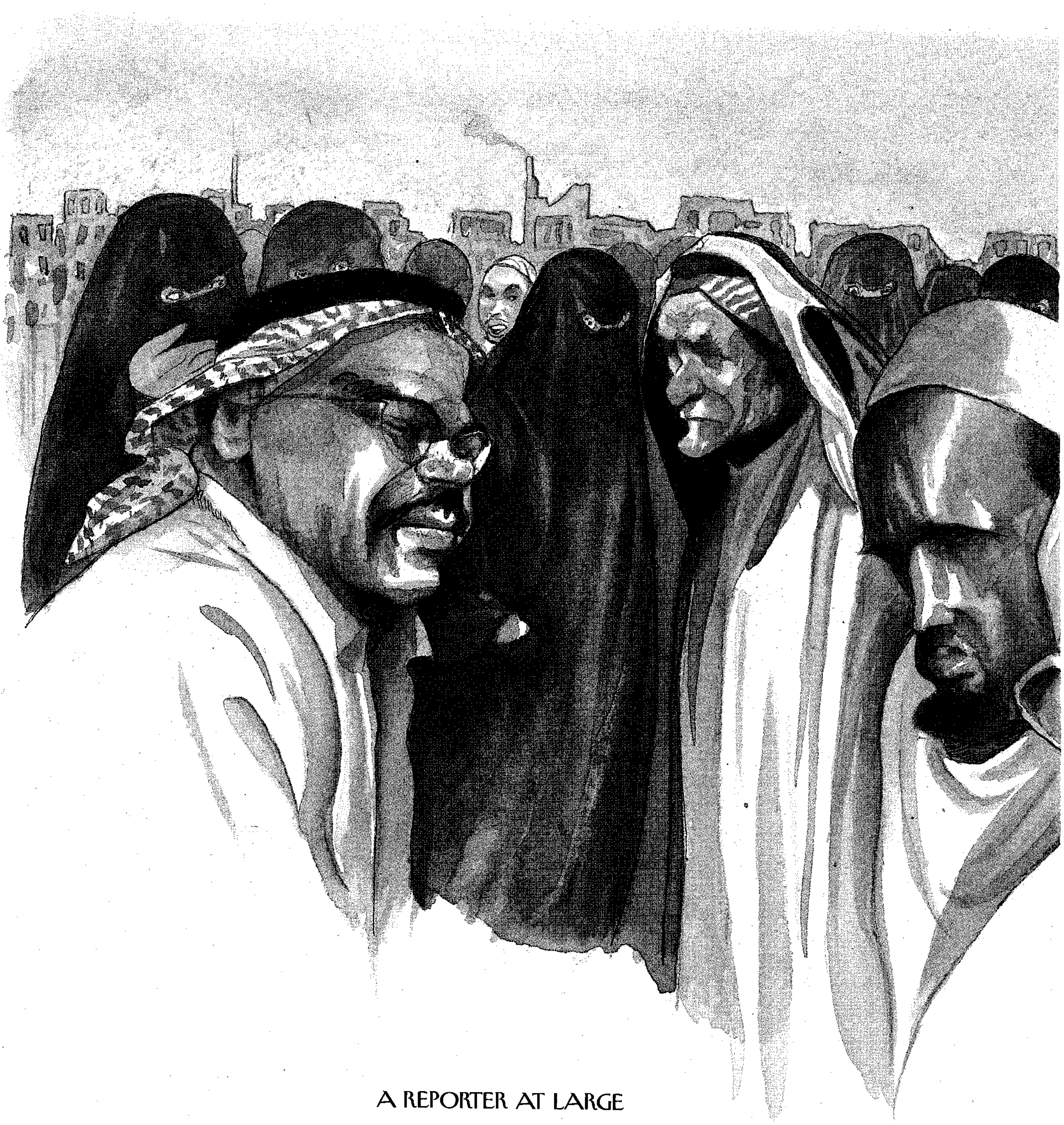


STEVE BRODNER

A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE KINGDOM OF SILENCE

A job at a Saudi newspaper offers a rare look inside a closed society.

BY LAWRENCE WRIGHT

"This is a *newspaper*?" I asked the cabdriver in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, as he pulled up in front of the lavish new headquarters of *Okaz*, the most popular paper in the kingdom. I had expected the usual dingy firetrap that characterizes newspaper offices all over the world, but this building loomed over the humble neighborhood like a royal palace. Workmen were still laying marble tiles on the steps as I entered a towering atrium. Envious reporters for other newspapers call *Okaz's* new headquarters the Taj Mahal. Saudi men whom I took to be reporters solemnly passed by, wearing crisp white robes and red checked head scarves. I felt out of place and underdressed.

Newspapers are a surprisingly good business in a country where the truth is so carefully guarded. Members of the royal family, Al Saud, are obsessively concerned about their image; they own or control most of the Saudi press, which dominates the Arab world. Within the kingdom,

there are more than a dozen papers on the newsstands every morning. The most authoritative of them, and the most progressive, *Al-Hayat* and *Asharq Al Awsat*, are owned by Saudi princes but published in London. They are constrained by the same taboos that cripple all Saudi publications, however: nothing provocative can be said about Islam, the kingdom's official religion; the government, which is effectively led by Crown Prince Abdullah; or the royal family, which is headed by King Fahd. Another paper, *Al Watan*, partly owned by Prince Bandar bin Khalid, models itself on *USA Today*. But *Okaz* remains the national favorite. On the coffee table in the lobby was a copy of that morning's edition, January 28, 2003. It was like an Arabic version of the New York *Post*, filled with Hollywood gossip, and stories of djinns who haunt the sand dunes. Although ostensibly independent, *Okaz* is closely identified with Prince Naif bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, the Minister of Interior, who also controls the secret police and the media.

Up a flight of stairs, in a modest wing by itself, is the *Saudi Gazette*, an English-language daily published by *Okaz*, which had hired me for three months to help train young Saudi reporters. The job offered me a way of getting into the kingdom after more than a year of fruitless attempts to get a visa as a journalist. Working at the *Gazette* would also give me a vantage on the Saudi press, which had struggled for a decade to liberate itself from the bonds of government control. In 1990, just before the Gulf War, the government forced the media to wait a week before reporting on Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. Satellite news coverage, which emerged as a force during that conflict, leaped borders, as did the Internet. The press gained a measure of freedom. Suddenly, there were stories about crime, drug use, divorce, even the presence of AIDS in the kingdom. For the first time, Saudis were taking a critical look at their country and its problems. But after September 11th the media retreated; as a result, it largely missed the biggest story in the kingdom's modern history, blinding itself to the danger within its own society.

Walking around the *Gazette,* I soon found Dr. Muhammad Shoukany, the deputy editor-in-chief, sitting in a dim office overlooking the newsroom. There was a television in one corner, and a Mexican soap opera was playing on mute. Like most Saudi men, he wore a white *thobe*, a shirtlike gown that reached his ankles. His head scarf, called a *gutra*, was folded on the couch, but he wore the white skullcap that goes under it, which gave him a pastoral air. He is a stocky man, with a round face and a narrow salt-and-pepper mustache. At heart, he is an academic, not a newsman, and he teaches courses in English literature at King Abdul Aziz University, in Jeddah. As we talked, it seemed to me that his eyes were almost retractable, receding into slitted boredom when the subject was not of interest to him, then bulging with excitement when he was fully engaged—as when he told me about his great passion, Joseph Conrad. "Some of the characters in his early stories come from the Hadhramaut, which is where the bin Ladens come from," Shoukany said. "Also, in 'Lord Jim' there is one of the earliest mentions in literature of a Wahhabi preacher. Conrad is definitely a man of our time!"

Shoukany assumed that I had come to the country with a set of stereotypes about Saudis. I had spent some time in the Arab world—my wife and I taught for two years at the American University in Cairo long ago, and I had travelled in and reported from the Middle East—but I had never been in the kingdom before. Most of my encounters with Saudis had been in Cairo or London, and these Saudis were either political dissidents or disaffected scholars. "All we ask is that you judge us on our own terms," Shoukany said.

He led me through the newsroom, where two dozen editors and typesetters, most of them Indian expatriates, were working on Apple G4s. I could see layouts for the next morning's paper on the screens. The readership of the *Gazette* is drawn largely from the millions of foreign workers, like these editors, who do much of the essential labor in the kingdom, from driving cabs to manning the oil fields. World and national news is at the front of the paper, with separate pages for the Indian subcontinent and the Philippines, where most of the expats come from. There is also a culture section, a sports page (primarily soccer and cricket), business news, and editorials. Most of the international news comes from wire services. On Friday, Islam's holy day, there is a page on Islamic teachings.

In a side room, at a long library table, four translators from Sudan were scanning the daily Arabic press for usable stories. One of them wore a white turban and another had tribal scars on his cheeks. A Yemeni and a couple of Bangladeshi teaboys in brown uniforms patrolled the floor. Beyond the main newsroom, behind a long wall of glass, the local reporters were waiting to meet me.

I sensed the lethargy as soon as I entered the room. Cigarette smoke combined with a fluorescent pall to create a dense, subterranean atmosphere. Three young Saudi reporters greeted me with expressions that appeared welcoming but puzzled. I was also supposed to be training female reporters, but I hadn't seen a woman since I entered the building.

We sat down, and I asked them to tell me about themselves. There were two reporters named Hasan—Hasan Baswaid and Hasan Hatrash—but they were strikingly different. Baswaid, thirty-four, was tall and broad-shouldered, with sideburns and curly black hair, and omnipresent earphones for his mobile phone, which rang every few minutes, playing the theme from "Mission: Impossible." He wore jeans and a partly buttoned, untucked white shirt. His handsome face belonged on the cover of a romance novel. Hatrash, twenty-eight, was slight and short; he wore traditional Saudi clothes, a trim black goatee, and black glasses that tended to be at half-mast on his nose. Under his head scarf, however, there was a snaky mass of dreadlocks. At heart, Hatrash said, he was a musician, but that was a hopeless career choice in such a puritanical society. Both men had been working at the *Gazette* for several years; the third reporter, Mamdouh al-Harthy, had joined the staff only about an hour before I arrived.

"How do you like working here?" I asked them.

The two Hasans shrugged and looked away. "Maybe we can talk about this later, mon," Hatrash said. It was several weeks before I learned why he had a West Indian accent: he had honed his English by listening to Bob Marley songs.

The serendipitous assignment of training young reporters, I may as well confess, thrilled me. I suspected that behind the closed gates of Saudi society there was a social revolution in the making. With some guidance, I thought, these journalists could help inspire change. Confronted with the demoralized reporters in my charge, however, I didn't know where to begin. My duties were vague. I was to "mentor" the reporters by hanging around the office for part of each day, and teaching them some elementary techniques of investigative journalism.

"Don't expect too much," Shoukany had warned me. "You can assign them stories, do whatever you want. You have complete freedom." I wondered what he meant by that.

My first big task was to help the local reporters cover the 2003 hajj, which began in February. Each year, at the end of the Islamic calendar, more than two million pilgrims arrive in Jeddah on their way to Mecca, forty miles to the east. It is the largest annual human gathering in the world. It is also the biggest event for the local press to cover, and competition for stories is fierce. The *Gazette* was sending four reporters—most of the male staff—to cover it; Hasan Hatrash would lead the team.

In the past, the hajj has been the scene of numerous tragedies: stampedes, fires, air crashes, bombings, bloody riots, and epidemics. The pilgrims, coming from all over the world, invariably bring with them assorted viruses and bacteria, and by the time this hajj started, on February 9th, there had already been outbreaks of influenza and meningitis in the kingdom. Hatrash wasn't worried, though. He told me that he insured his immunity by eating small green native lemons. "They protect me against everything," he said.

The expectation of war in Iraq made this hajj especially tense. If the war began before the pilgrims got home, they could be stranded for months. The Saudi government's ambiguous attitude toward the Iraq crisis—officially condemning it, but allowing American forces to use Saudi bases as a staging area for search-and-rescue missions—left the kingdom open to political demonstrations by Muslims who opposed the war. The government, remembering disasters of the past, was determined to squelch any such dissent. One of the most significant moments in modern Saudi history came at the end of the 1979 hajj. Several hundred Islamist radicals, many of them students, took over the Grand Mosque in Mecca, using the holiest spot in Islam as a forum for challenging the authority of the royal family. King Khalid obtained a fatwa from the clergy that allowed government troops to retake the mosque. Two weeks of savage, hand-to-hand combat in the underground chambers of the holy site left a hundred and twenty-seven Saudi soldiers dead and more than four hundred and fifty injured. French commandos provided the Saudis with an unspecified "nonlethal" gas. When that failed to flush out the terrorists, according to the head of Saudi intelligence at the time, Saudi forces dropped hand grenades through holes drilled into the chambers. Amazingly, a hundred and seventy rebels survived; sixty-three of them were beheaded, in the largest mass execution in Saudi history.

This year, as many as half the pilgrims would be women—the highest percentage ever—but, curiously, the *Gazette* was not sending any female reporters to cover the event. According to Shoukany, I was supposed to have three women under my supervision, but after a week at the paper I still had not met them. By then, I had spotted a sign on the first floor marked "Ladies Section," but I had no idea who, if anyone, was behind the door. Shoukany assured me that female reporters were permitted to attend meetings in the conference room, but they missed the first session I called, at four o'clock on a Wednesday afternoon. "I learned they go home early," Shoukany said apologetically.

The following day, with the meeting set for an hour earlier, three black-shrouded figures slipped into the *Gazette* conference room. Once they were seated, the male reporters followed, arraying themselves on the opposite side of the table. I sat awkwardly at the head. The women were all in black abayas and hijabs—the obligatory robes and head scarves—and one of them veiled her face as well. Only a pair of gold-rimmed glasses peeked out from the mask of cloth surrounding her eyes. Hanging from her chair was an alligator purse with a long gold chain.

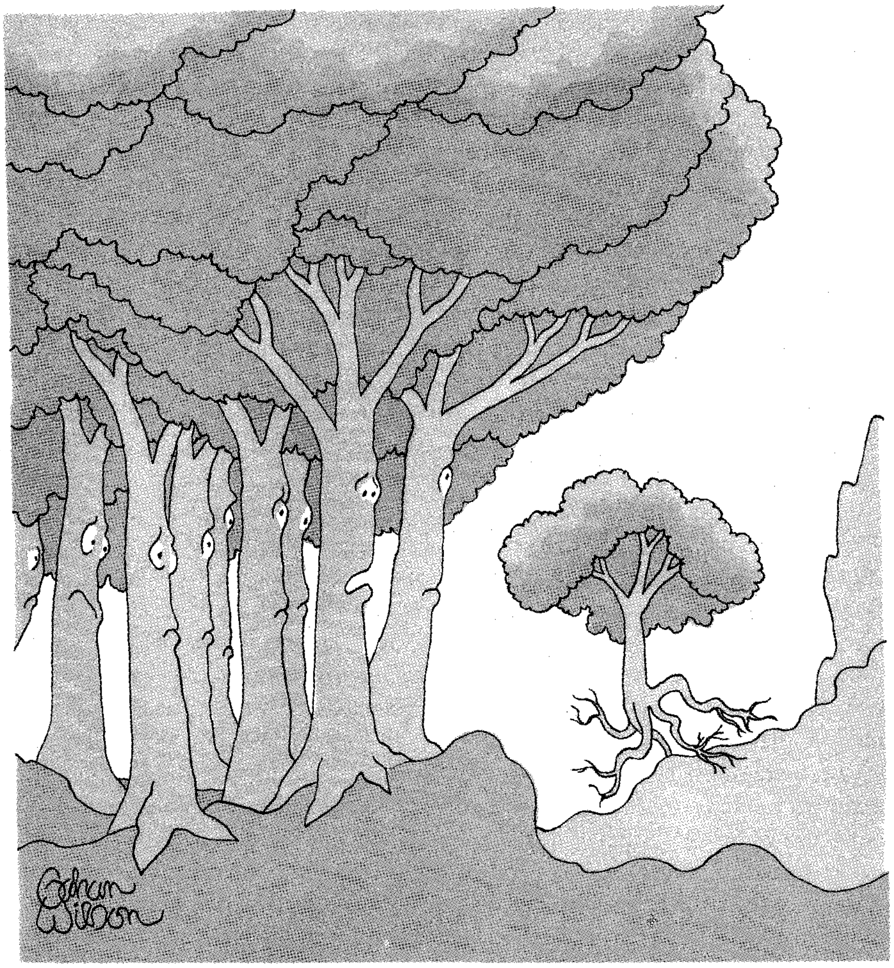
The self-effacement of an entire sex, and, in consequence, of sexuality itself, was the most unnerving feature of Saudi life. I could go through an entire day without seeing any women, except perhaps some beggars sitting on the curb outside a prince's house. Almost all public space, from the outdoor terrace at the Italian restaurant to the sidewalk tables at Starbucks, belonged to men. The restaurants had separate entrances for "families" and "bachelors," and I could hear women scurrying past, hidden by screens, as they went upstairs or to a rear room. The only places I was sure to see women were at the mall and the grocery store, and even there they seemed spookily out of place. Many of them wore black gloves, and their faces were covered entirely—not even a pair of plummy, heavy-lidded Arabian eyes apparent. Sometimes I couldn't tell what direction they were facing. It felt to me as if the women had died, and only their shades remained.

The reporter with the alligator purse was named Najla Fathi. It was a surprise to learn that Najla and her female colleagues were far better educated than the men on the staff, most of whom had not finished college. Najla, for instance, had obtained a master's degree in political science from the University of Louisville, in 1995. "And I haven't been outside the Arab world since!" she said. Her tone suggested anger or defiance, or even an attempt at humor, but it was maddeningly difficult to read her intentions without access to her facial expressions.

I wanted to get the *Gazette* reporters like Najla started on investigative stories while Hatrash and his team were covering the hajj. There was one piece I was particularly keen on. In March, 2002, a fire had broken out in the Thirty-first Girls' Middle School, in Mecca, a dilapidated four-story building that held eight hundred and thirty-five students and fifty-five teachers. According to initial reports, the fire had begun in the kitchen at about eight in the morning, creating panic. The only exit was locked; an elderly guard had wandered away with the key. Fifteen girls were trampled to death; more than fifty others were injured, some having jumped from the windows. According to eyewitnesses, a number of people had rushed to put out the blaze, but they were turned away by a representative of the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice—the country's religious police—because the girls were not wearing their abayas. (The director of the commission denied these accounts.)

Female education, which was introduced in 1960, was born in controversy. Although females now outnumber males at the university level, only six per cent of women in the over-all population are employed, a statistic that has led religious conservatives to argue that education is "wasted on girls." After the fire, the head of the Presidency of Girls' Education an-

"I could prescribe a massive amount of painkillers, but I'm the computer repairman."



"Very few leave the grove!"

nounced that it had been "God's will." He said this at a press conference at which he awarded each reporter an expensive lambskin briefcase. I was told that he was later photographed surveying the ruins of the school in his ministerial robes; the pictures captured him stepping absent-mindedly on the abayas that had been left behind.

But it was the detail about the religious police blocking the rescue of the girls that sent the country into a paroxysm of introspection. Ever since the 1979 attack on the Grand Mosque, the *muttawa'a*, as these government-subsidized vigilantes are informally called, have become a far more invasive presence in the country. The lesson the royal family had drawn from that attack was that it could protect itself from religious extremists only by empowering them. The *muttawa'a* prowl restaurants and shopping malls and amusement parks, making sure that businesses have closed for prayer time and chastising women whose attire fails to meet their standards of modesty. They have been known to shoot up satellite dishes and break into private homes. The *muttawa'a* are usually trailed by official policemen, who are at their command.

The Saudi press made history by writing about the fire without first asking the Ministry of Information for permission. For several weeks, the government stood aside and simply let the press be free. "When will we ever be ashamed of our attitude towards women?" the editor of *Al Riyadh* asked his readers. "We ascribe all of society's ills to them. . . . Does the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice care about our wives, sisters, mothers and daughters more than we do?" The *Gazette*, which rarely criticized the government, demanded an investigation of the religious police and prosecution of those responsible for the deaths of the girls. By Saudi standards, the coverage was so relentless that even reformists were troubled. Eventually, the Interior Minister summoned the editors-in-chief of all the newspapers in the country and told them that the stories must stop. They immediately did.

For Saudi journalists, the drama over the girls' school was both liberating and disconcerting. It confirmed that the Saudi press could play a dissenting role. But some said that, ultimately, the story had proved to be a setback; the government sharply reduced the zone of freedom because it had been so alarmed by the popular fury the story had unleashed.

Near the end of the Thursday meeting, I suggested assigning a one-year-anniversary story about the event. I wanted a woman reporter to write it. "The question is, after a year, have things really changed?" I asked.

"Of course they have," Najla said impatiently, leaning on the table with what must have been her chin resting on her fist. "Everybody knows this. The head of the Presidency of Girls' Education was fired. They merged that department into the Ministry of Education. These are huge changes."

"To me, they seem like symbolic changes," I said. "The girls died because they were locked inside a ramshackle, overcrowded building with no fire escapes. Is the government actually building safe schools for girls? Are the teachers conducting fire drills? Are girls still locked inside?"

One of the women, Sabahat Siddiqi, shyly spoke up. "I will do this story, if you will tell me how," she said. I suggested that Sabahat talk to civil-defense authorities to see if they have improved fire safety, and to the Minister of Education to determine if the government had followed through on its pledge to build safe schools. I advised her to go to Mecca and talk to the families of the girls who died. She should visit girls' schools in Jeddah, and talk to women educators to see whether they were satisfied with the government's response. Sabahat nodded and earnestly took notes, but Najla laughed. "That's not the way things work here," she warned me.

While Hatrash and his hajj team were in Mecca, I took time to drive around Jeddah. I rented a Hyundai, with fifty-seven thousand kilometres on it, that had already been dented on every panel, including the roof. The traffic was frightening. "We have the highest number of accidents in the world, and we don't even have alcohol!" Hatrash had told me. He attributed the accident rate to the high level of stress in Saudi society, which also contributes to extraordinary rates of diabetes and high blood pressure in the kingdom. Every time a signal turned green, drivers in the far-right lane turned left across six lanes, drivers in the left-hand lane went straight, then we all sped like dragsters to the next light.

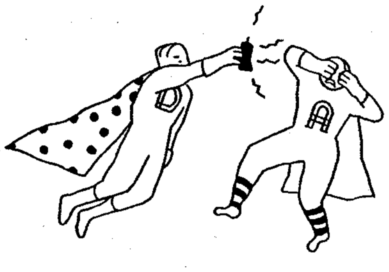
Jeddah is an ancient city that displays almost no evidence of the past. In the Old Quarter, houses made of coral brick with latticed balconies are crumbling from neglect. Buildings that fell decades ago are still rubble. Outside this small historical district, one enters what could be a seedy suburb of Houston, with familiar American franchises lining potholed boulevards. Despite the wealth of the bin Laden clan, Osama bin Laden grew up here, in a working-class neighborhood called Al Amariyya, where laundry dries on the balconies and shopkeepers chat on the stoops. Later, he moved with his mother and his stepfather to a new neighborhood; they lived in a modest white villa on Jabal al-Arab Street, with a filigree iron gate and a small courtyard. In 1984, when Osama took a second wife, he bought a run-down apartment house off Macaroni Street—so named because of an old pasta factory nearby.

At night, teen-agers cruise Palestine Street, one of Jeddah's main thoroughfares, which begins in the desert hills on the east side of town and ends at the Red Sea. On the beach, families picnic and go for camel rides and sport about in fanciful neon-lit donkey carts. Between the beach and a spit of land that holds the summer royal palace, a majestic fountain spouts eight hundred and fifty-three feet into the air, making it the tallest in the world. (Jeddah also boasts the world's largest Chuck E. Cheese pizza parlor.) Everything of value that Saudi Arabia produces—i.e., oil—comes out of the Eastern Province, on the other side of the country, where supertankers ply the Persian Gulf on their way to refuelling the industrial world. The Jeddah Islamic Seaport, on the other hand, is devoted almost entirely to imports—food, clothing, appliances, furniture, and electronics, which fill the stores in this highly consuming but notoriously unproductive society.

The kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded in its modern incarnation in 1932, by Abdul Aziz ibn Abdul Rahman Al-Saud. The first oil boom hit in the early fifties, and soon desert nomads were docking their yachts in Monaco and renting entire floors of the Ritz. By 1981, per-capita income was more than twenty-eight thousand dollars, about equal to that of the United States at the time. Saudi Arabia seemed to be on the way to becoming the richest nation in history, the global landlord. Oil prices have fluctuated since then, but today, with oil again at more than thirty dollars a barrel, the Saudi per-capita income is less than seven thousand dollars, around that of Mexico. (Statistics in the kingdom are rarely more than guesses. An employee at the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry cheerfully told me, "At the chamber, we cook our own figures.")

The oil wealth of the country runs first through royal pockets. Various businessmen and economists speculate that as much as thirty or forty per cent is skimmed by the Al Saud family. "We build forty-million-dollar palaces for even minor princes," an architect told me. Those closest to the crown are staggeringly wealthy. "Abdul Aziz bin Fahd, a son of King Fahd, is in his early thirties, and his wealth alone could solve the entire unemployment problem of Saudi Arabia," Mohsen Al-Awajy, a lawyer and a spokesman for Wahhabi dissidents, told me. "There are billions upon billions in his account. Nobody can challenge him. Nobody can ask the royal family, 'Why?' "

Still, with Saudi Arabia containing one-fourth of the world's known oil reserves, the government has no need to tax its citizens. Education and health care are free. But there is little evidence of public wealth or charity. As I explored the kingdom, I noticed few parks or playgrounds or museums. There are not enough universities or private schools to serve the population; practically no research institutions; few public arts groups; and no human-rights organization. Philanthropy fails to make up for the government's neglect; for one thing, the absence of taxes means that there are no charitable deductions and therefore no financial incentives for giving.



The fact that there are no secular charities or non-governmental institutions or, of course, political parties—civil society, in other words—means that there is no moderate, stabilizing middle ground between the government and the clerics. This situation has, naturally, elevated the power of religious conservatives. Although many of its own citizens struggle to make do, the Saudi government sends about two billion dollars a year in aid to other Islamic countries, building mosques and madrassas, underwriting religious universities, distributing books and tracts, funding charities—and supporting jihad. These donations, approved by the small inner circle of elderly princes who run the government, are made with an eye toward placating the country's religious extremists; they also insure that the Wahhabi strain of Sunni Islam, the official dogma of the kingdom, will be the Muslim voice heard above all others.

Life in the kingdom changed after the 1979 attack on the Grand Mosque. Wahhabi clerics, with their fear of outside influences, waged war on art and the pleasures of the intellect. Music was the first victim. Umm Kulthum and Fairouz, the songbirds of the Arab world, disappeared from the Saudi television stations. A magnificent concert hall in Riyadh was completed in 1989, but no performance has ever been held there. The Islamic courts have even banned the music played when a telephone call is placed on hold. There had been some movie theatres, but they were all shut down.

Since the mosque attack, religion has become a steadily increasing part of the Saudi school curriculum, so students have less exposure to science, art, and languages. "My kid is in the fifth grade," Omar Bagour, a columnist for *Al Madina* and a professor of economics at King Abdul Aziz University, told me. "Out of twelve subjects, seven are pure religion. You tell me a system of this nature is going to bring into the labor force a highly qualified Saudi? Bullshit." The religious establishment, however, wants education to become even more Islamic. "Educational systems of atheist nations and civilizations cannot be like the systems of a believing nation," Saalih Ibn Humayd, a Saudi cleric, warned in a recent speech. "This country represents the power of Islam. . . . Any attempt to change this status will be vehemently opposed."

The religious establishment makes sure that millions of Islamic books are translated into other languages each year, but very few books are translated into Arabic. "Censorship of books is more rigid now than forty years back," Muhammad Salahuddin, a columnist for *Al Madina*, told me one night at dinner. "Back then, I could buy a copy of 'Das Kapital' in Mecca. Now you cannot dream of finding such books."

Although there are several popular Saudi painters in the kingdom, the Wahhabi ban on the representation of human beings or animals makes for geometric abstractions and unpeopled landscapes, a studied avoidance of the real. There was even a cultural war over the Starbucks logo—a mermaid, which, strictly speaking, is neither human nor animal but mythological. The religious police complained about the emblem when the company opened its first store, in Riyadh, in 2000; under pressure, Starbucks changed its logo. Government authorities eventually overruled the complaint, and by the time I got to Jeddah the mermaid was back on the company's signs.

One evening in Riyadh, I went to the National Museum after evening prayers. It is a spectacular building, made of Arabian limestone and designed, by the Canadian firm Moriyama & Teshima, to resemble the gently bending wall of a desert wadi. I walked through the vast exhibition halls alone, except for a Saudi couple and their young daughter. I could hear their footsteps echoing just behind me, and their voices, hushed in the emptiness. The display cases told the history of the Arabian Peninsula, from the dinosaurs and the early petroglyphs to the triumphant arrival of Islam. Eerily absent from the exhibit are representations of the people who lived there. I suppose that was why there were practically no other visitors in the museum; it was a story with no characters.

In one of the grand halls, I noticed an odd cul-de-sac, under a stairwell, where I found a painting of a human face—the only one in the museum. It was a wall drawing from the village of Al Fao, from the second or third century A.D., depicting a man with a garland around his curly hair. It looked like a Roman Christian icon; at that time, Jews and Christians were making inroads among the polytheists of the peninsula. The man had wide, round eyes, like the figures in the frescoes of Pompeii. I suppose it was a tribute to the importance of this miniature portrait that it was displayed at all; still, to be hidden under the stairs, almost as if it were pornography, made me admire as never before the power of the human form.

One day in Jeddah, I went across town to see Jamal Khashoggi, who was then the deputy editor of the *Arab News*, the main English-language competitor of the *Saudi Gazette*. We met in his office. He is a tall man with a trim beard and a pale, moon-shaped face. He had covered the Afghan jihad sympathetically, and had been a friend of bin Laden's; but he had rejected the Islamist movement when it turned toward terror. After September 11th, he was practically the only Saudi journalist who addressed the cultural failures within Saudi society which contributed to that tragedy. "Despite the enormity of what happened, we are still in denial," he wrote a year after the event. "We still cling to unlikely conspiracy theories and eye the truth with suspicion. The most pressing issue now is to ensure that our children can never be influenced by extremist ideas—like those fifteen Saudis who were misled into hijacking four planes on that fine September day, piloting them, and us, straight into the jaws of hell."

After tea had been served, Khashoggi and I began talking about the term "schizophrenic," which many Saudis use to characterize the quality of their lives. Khashoggi said it referred to the split between what he called "virtual" Saudi Arabia and "real" Saudi Arabia. "The virtual Saudi Arabia actually exists in its rules and in the minds of the people," he told me. "For instance, in virtual Saudi Arabia there is no satellite television. In principle, and by law, you are not allowed to own a satellite dish. But in reality we are the biggest consumers of satellite television in the Middle East. Not only that, Saudi businessmen are also the biggest investors in satellites. In principle, and by law, Saudi Arabia is not supposed to have interest-based banking, but in fact ninety per cent of our banking system is interest-based. And it goes on and on. The solution for Saudi problems is to bring the virtual world and the real world together."

I asked Khashoggi what role the press could play in the country's efforts to change. "I don't think the press *can* play a role," he told me. "I don't see a single paper calling for reform. The papers are not structured in a way to make that possible." (Every editor-in-chief is ultimately approved by the Minister of Interior, who is also in charge of the country's secret police.) Khashoggi pointed to a broad petition for reform that had been put forward, in February, by a hundred and four Saudi intellectuals. Crown Prince Abdullah, the de-facto ruler of the country, had received the signers warmly, but not a single newspaper had published their list of demands. The limits of press freedom were always changing, Khashoggi explained. "We are pushing the boundaries but at the same time being cautious," he said. "Now it's accepted that we can get on the toes of the mayor but not those of the governor."

Later, I met with Hussein Shobokshi, a columnist for *Okaz* and a wealthy building contractor, who embodies the progressive, often American-educated business community. (He graduated from the University of Tulsa.) Shobokshi was a member of the board of trustees of the private female college in Jeddah. He is a good-looking man, with large, sleepy eyes and a wry sense of humor. His father was head of *Okaz* and the founder of the *Saudi Gazette*, and Hussein is a major stockholder. He told me that there had been some progress in press freedom in the past decade: "Now we don't get locked up because of what we say; we get locked up because of what we do."

The girls'-school story, Shobokshi said, was "a very important dialogue between the government and the press. But there is no new cause célèbre."

"If you were trying to point young reporters to one story that could shake the country, what would it be?" I asked him.

"Sewage," he said emphatically.

Twenty years ago, Shobokshi told me, Jeddah had been provided with the money to build a modern sewage system that would accommodate the fast-growing city. The government official in charge of the project, however, took the money and built himself a mansion in

San Francisco and a palace in Jeddah that is equipped with a discothèque and a bowling alley. As a result, Shobokshi said, the streets in Jeddah are constantly filled with tanker trucks to drain the city's cesspools. Worse, sewage has got mixed into Jeddah's groundwater, and this has contaminated drinking water in many parts of the city. "We have new diseases of the eye and skin that didn't exist here ten years ago," Shobokshi said. "Lung and breast cancers are forty per cent above the national rate. Hepatitis is so high that it has to be classified as an epidemic. Marine biologists tell me that certain fishes have become extinct because of the overflow. Swimming will be history."

Shobokshi said that he had travelled to Delft University of Technology, in Holland, for advice. "I gave them all the figures. They told me, 'Hussein, you've got a time bomb.' The sewage right now is dumped in a huge lake above the city. The walls of this lake are made of sand. And Jeddah is on a geological fault! They said that if there's an earthquake of five on the Richter scale it will take six hours for the entire city of Jeddah to be flooded with sewage water one and a half metres deep."

"What happened to the guy who stole the money?"

"The government investigated and it was ruled that he should pay a penalty and go to jail," Shobokshi said. "But then he was pardoned because his brother is the private secretary to the King."

Shobokshi confided that he was initiating what he called "the first-ever class-action lawsuit in the kingdom." He was gathering five thousand signatures and had hired ten young lawyers to prepare the case. Nobody had yet written about the suit in the press, and he agreed that if the *Saudi Gazette* published a series of stories about the sewage crisis he'd give the paper a scoop about the lawsuit. He had me hooked, and he knew it. "This is history with a capital 'H,'" he said.

A few days later, I was handed the draft of an article by Mamdouh al-Harthy, the new reporter. He was from a prominent Bedouin tribe, but instead of a *thobe* he usually dressed in upscale casual Western clothes—jeans, oversized T-shirt, and sunglasses—with the name of the designer prominently displayed on every item. "Chicks notice such things," he advised me. When we went to the mall together, he stopped in his tracks like a bird dog and watched a pair of girls, entirely swathed in black, descending an escalator. "Check 'em out!" he said, without irony.

Mamdouh was a child of the souk. His father owned an elegant shop downtown that sold dates and candies. He had a merchant's facility with languages, speaking Urdu and Turkish, and his English was so colloquial that I never thought to worry about his writing ability. He had been working on a story about the hajj travel industry. His first draft began, "Hundreds of airplanes flaying hajjis to Saudi Arabia to performed hajj .most of those planes go back with no single passenger such as the Turkish airlines .other airlines claimed they r full occupied." I read through the brief piece, wondering what he could possibly mean by "the income is very pen fetal."

"What do you think, chief?" Mamdouh asked.

"I want you to write this for me in Arabic," I said.

"No problemo," he said, but he sounded a little puzzled.

When he finished, I took his Arabic draft to one of the Sudanese translators.

"It's excellent Arabic," he told me.

I went back to Mamdouh. "How far did you go in school?" I asked.

"I've got a B.A. in English literature."

That stopped me. "O.K., now you're in charge of your own education," I told him. "Stop watching girls. Read a book in English. Watch BBC. Rent American movies. Whatever you do, do it in English. In the meantime, write your articles in Arabic first, then translate them."

"O.K., chief," he said, but he sounded discouraged.

All the reporters had problems writing English—that was what the Indian editors were there for. The editors could sometimes salvage pieces that were inscrutable to me. But I wondered why the paper refused to hire an experienced bilingual reporter. Every other week, it seemed, a new reporter came on board, often someone just out of high school. They weren't really expected to produce. Some

ACME WEAR
REASONS FOR RETURN
☐ Too big.
☐ Too small.
☐ Too ugly.
☐ Too sweatery.
☐ Hated smell.
☐ Texture creeped me out.
☐ Thought I saw Satan's face in right armpit.
☐ It's much, much, much, much, much too nice for the likes of me.
☐ Decorative shards caused irritation.
☐ Bought while drunk-shopping.
☐ Thought it would be made of scrapple.
☐ Had a nightmare about it.
☐ Made my bust look strange.
☐ It told me it wanted to "go home."
CHECK ALL THAT APPLY
R. Chast

reporters went weeks without writing a single story, and when they did it might be about an event that had taken place ten days before. Many mornings, the paper didn't carry any local news at all. I began to wonder if it was an accident that the local reporters were ill-equipped to handle the job.

I was heartened, therefore, to read some engaging stories from the *Gazette* team in Mecca. "The tent city of Mina, on the outskirts of Makkah, is all ready to welcome the pilgrims," the *Gazette* reported on the eve of the hajj. Five hospitals with more than seven hundred beds were set up. Thirty thousand butchers staffing five slaughterhouses were on hand to dispatch hundreds of thousands of sacrificial animals. According to a story filed by Hasan Hatrash, four thousand Boy Scouts would have new software available to help pilgrims locate their cots among the forty-four thousand air-conditioned tents that filled the valley like a white-capped sea. "Scouts until recently used to serve in excess of ten thousand lost pilgrims a day," Hatrash wrote.

The second morning of the hajj, immediately after the dawn prayer, the pilgrims proceeded to Mt. Arafat, twelve miles outside Mecca. There, nearly fourteen hundred years ago, the Prophet gave his last sermon. The second day is supposed to be a day of repentance and self-examination, but the air was charged with politics. "Don't you see how the enemies are gathering and are preparing to wage war on you?" the Grand Mufti, Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah Aal Al-Sheikh, said in his noon sermon. Many pilgrims told the *Gazette* team that they hoped Iraq would be "victorious" in the coming conflict. "America wants to control the Arab world and its wealth. We are all soldiers for Iraq," a Syrian hajji said.

Later that day, Hatrash called me. He was furious because many of the stories that he and his team were writing weren't getting into the paper—"and Najla Fathi gets a big story about a conference five days old!" It was true that Najla's story, about a cultural symposium in Mecca, was a little stale, but it was the only piece we had in the paper reflecting the participation of women in the hajj. Hatrash also had a piece about the first baby born during that year's pilgrimage, on Mt. Arafat, but another story, about a hajji who had a heart attack and was brought back to life, didn't run.

"You sound terrible," I observed.

"It's the flu, mon," he said.

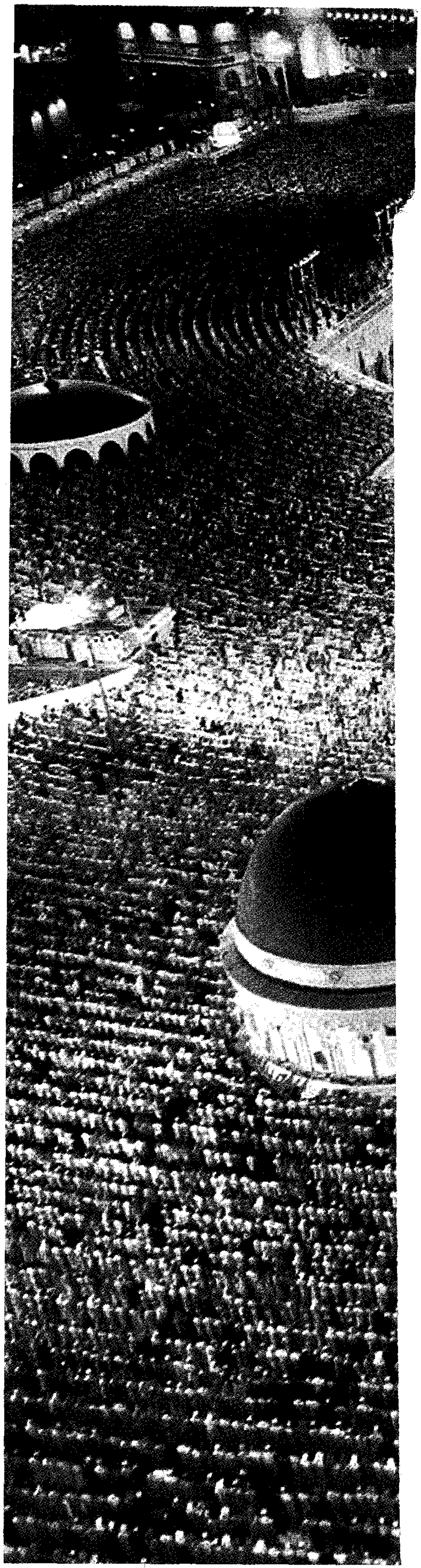
"I thought the lemons were supposed to protect you."

Hatrash admitted that he'd neglected to buy any. I worried that he was too ill to supervise the other reporters; some of them were also getting the flu. "Now we will have to expect that they will bring it back to us," Dr. Shoukany said unsympathetically. "For the next two weeks, everyone will be sick."

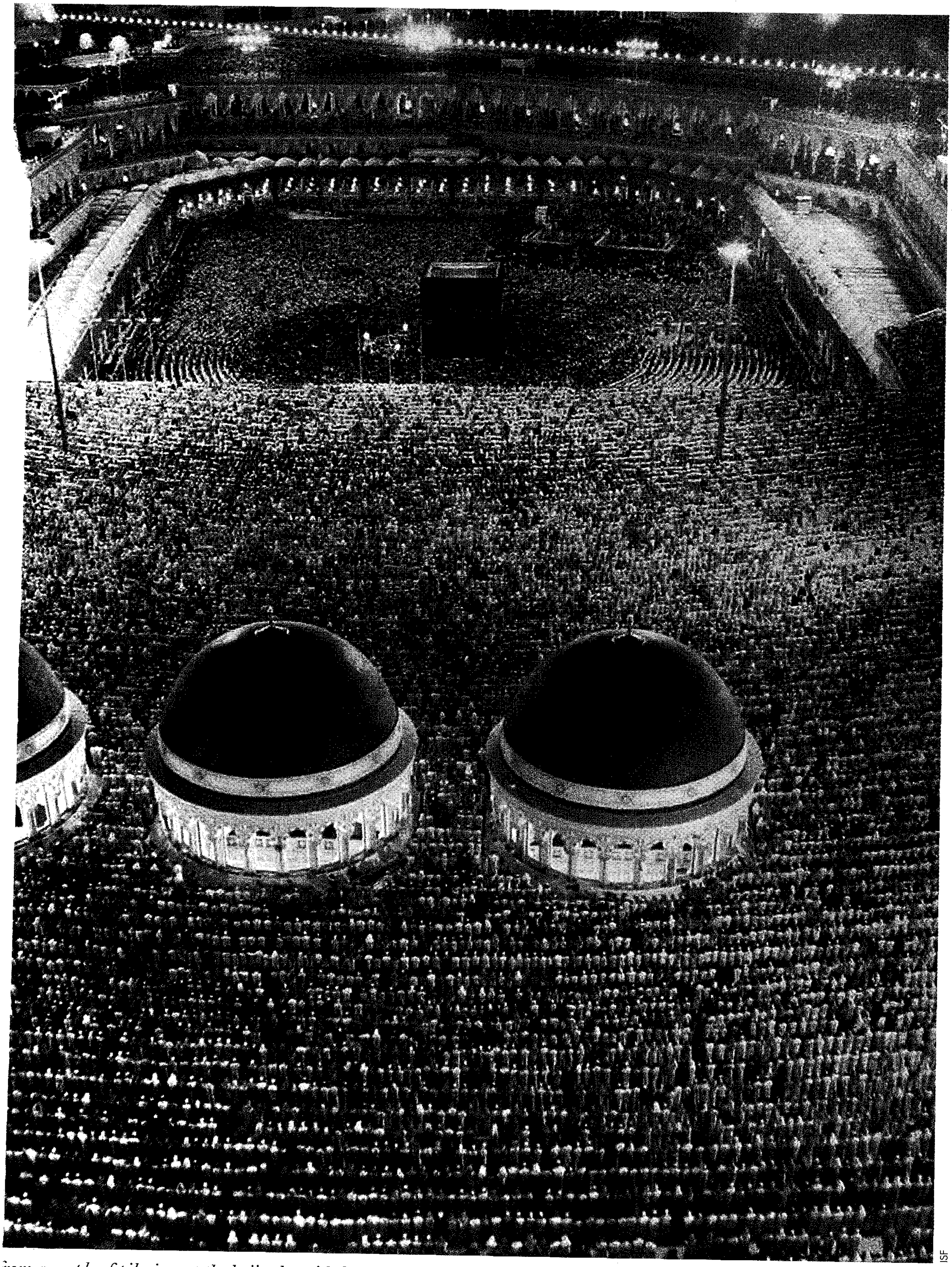
The *Gazette* story the next morning was "FAITHFUL STONE THE DEVIL, MAKE SACRIFICES." After spending the night praying under the stars, the pilgrims had returned to Mina, each collecting seven pebbles along the way. Then they threw the pebbles at three stone pillars, called the Jamarat, which is where Satan tried to tempt the prophet Mohammed. The Stoning of the Devil, which lasts for three days, is the climax of the hajj; it is also the most dangerous period, as people jostle to the front to throw their rocks, and sometimes shoes or umbrellas, crying "*Allahu Akbar!*"

Mazhar Siddiqi, Sabahat's father and the national-affairs editor at the *Gazette*, was upset by the quotes from a couple of pilgrims who said that they were imagining George Bush when they hurled the pebbles at the Devil. "What is behind this?" he asked me. "Saudi Arabia never has been a place that would talk against other countries. It has always been known for its neutrality." The subhead of the stoning story was "14 pilgrims killed in stampede." Around ten-thirty on the first morning of stoning, a group of hajjis leaving the Jamarat ran into another group just arriving; there was some shoving that quickly turned to panic. Fourteen deaths were sufficiently routine that they didn't merit a separate article.

"Something else we missed," Mazhar said grumpily the morning the pilgrimage ended. "It was the safest hajj in memory." This was despite three stampedes, and thirty-two pilgrims who died in traffic accidents, and five without valid permits who were run over as they tried to evade a checkpoint, and one Pakistani who was swallowed up by the sand while taking a nap. Altogether more than four hundred deaths were reported, most owing to natural causes. Hundreds more pilgrims suffered from heatstroke or food poisoning, but fortunately there



One Gazette editor was upset by the quot



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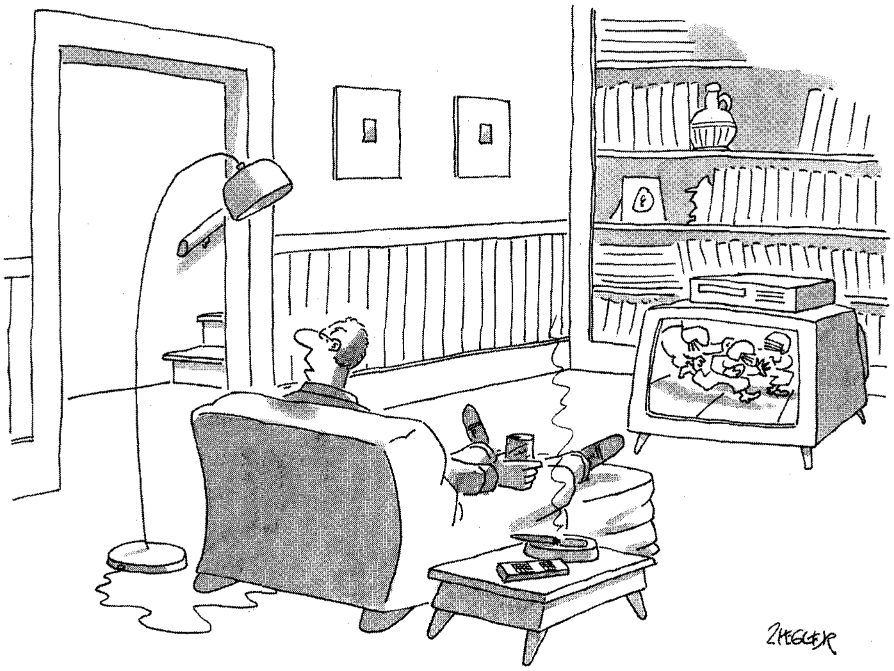
rom a couple of pilgrims at the hajj who said they were imagining George Bush when they hurled pebbles at the Devil.



"Say hi to your mother for me and tell her I'm happy her bypass turned out O.K."

• •

were no epidemics. Of course, when the *Gazette* team came back to Jeddah, everyone in the office got sick.

I kept pressing Sabahat Siddiqi to produce a draft about the aftermath of the girls'-school tragedy. Sabahat, who is Pakistani, reads Arabic poorly, and so Najla agreed to study the news clips and assemble some notes for her. Najla began by reading bound volumes of *Okaz* in our library. Then she called *Al Madina*, which was only a few blocks away. She was told that she could request pages for fifty riyals each (about fourteen dollars), but as a woman she could not enter the information center, nor would library clerks bring the clippings to her in the ladies' section.

"The public library should have all the clippings on microfilm," I suggested.

"Women aren't allowed in the public library, except one day a week," Najla informed me. And since there was a limit on how much she would be allowed to copy—no more than a few pages at a time—it would take her weeks to gather all the material.

I told her I would call the editor of *Al Madina* and ask him to help her. Also, I was sure there was a library at the women's college which she could use. The important thing was to get the facts about what occurred when the fire started, and what the government had promised to do afterward.

"There's another problem," she said. "There are some people who don't like knowing about depressing things, and one of those people is me." She paused. "What makes me upset is that, in my reading, I see that maybe some people are covering up."

She wouldn't tell me what she had learned. After a few weeks, I asked her why she hadn't gone to Mecca to interview the families or visited local schools to see if fire codes had been enacted. "Things are getting better," she insisted. She refused to dig any deeper.

Her reluctance puzzled me. Perhaps she was afraid of the authorities; one of the editors had told me that the women believed I was forcing them to do stories that were critical of the government. But Najla was one of our most ambitious reporters. Perhaps she felt protective of her society and didn't want to expose its shortcomings, although she had not hesitated to express criticism in conversation. In any case, her caution was so deeply embedded that I could not break through. Without her aid, Sabahat could not continue, and the story died. The first anniversary of the school fire came and went, largely unremarked in the Saudi press.

In frustration, I made some inquiries on my own. When I first heard of the tragedy, I had imagined that the girls were trampled as they fell in a stairwell or had been crushed against the door. Then I spoke to Dr. Khaled Abou El Fadl, a law professor at U.C.L.A. and a member of the board of Human Rights Watch. He told me that he had received a call from a businessman in Mecca who claimed to be the father of one of the dead girls. "He was at work, a ten-minute drive from the school," Abou El Fadl told me. "He got a call and rushed over, and there he encountered police and firemen. He pushed his way through, and then he noticed the *muttawa'a*." A few minutes later, the father said, his daughter ran to the gate with a group of girls. The girls pleaded for someone to let them out. "She was screaming, 'Break the lock! Break the lock!' " Abou El Fadl continued. "The smoke was overwhelming, it was very hot. One of the girls was screaming that her clothes were sticking to her skin."

Seventeen fire engines had responded to the alarm, along with members of the civil defense. Between them and the desperate students stood the *muttawa'a*. None of the representatives of Saudi society standing outside the gate of the girls' school—the police, the firemen, the parents, the bystanders—were able to summon the collective will to ignore the *muttawa'a* and save the girls. The man who called Abou El Fadl said he was afraid of challenging the religious police. They sent his daughter back into the school to get her abaya. She burned to death. "He said, 'I want the criminals tried. They murdered my daughter. Help me bring justice,' " Abou El Fadl told me. But that was the last he heard from the man.

No one was prosecuted for the deaths. The chief of police in Mecca told the Associated Press at the time that he had arrived to find a *muttawa'a*—he mentions only one—quarrelling with a police officer. "I immediately instructed him to leave, and he did," he said. The government said that there would be a follow-up investigation, but nothing came of it.

Men in white, women in black: the basic Saudi wardrobe expresses a polarity between the sexes that is absolute. The men look monkish in their gownlike *thobes*, made of cotton or silk, and the black bands around their head scarves reminded me of halos. They are as nearly covered up as the women (except those who, like Najla, choose to conceal their face). At first, I was frustrated by how little information I could gain about a man from looking at his white clothes, but soon I learned to read the accessories—the pen, the watch, the shoes—each of which was freighted with status. Nearly every Saudi man has facial hair. A long, full beard marks a man as pious. An untrimmed beard, a *thobe* that is a couple of inches shorter than usual, and the absence of a headband to hold the scarf in place: this is the costume of fundamentalists and the *muttawa'a*. Some Saudi men wear socks and shoes, but many prefer flat sandals made of ostrich or crocodile skin. Head scarves have a red-check or white-on-white pattern, but even these seemingly identical garments are full of nuance to the Saudi eye, which picks up the Valentino or Christian Dior name sewn into the weave. Heavy platinum Rolexes or TAG Heuers complete their wardrobes. (Islam allows only women to wear gold.)

The strict separation of the sexes is a comparatively recent phenomenon, as Abdullah al-Shehri, a professor of linguistics at King Abdul Aziz University, explained during a long conversation in a Starbucks. "There is a religious term, *khalwah*, which means a man and a woman who are unrelated and are behind a closed door," Abdullah said. "There is another term, *ikhtilat*. This is an invented term. It's heard only in Saudi Arabia, and is never mentioned in any religious text. It means 'mixing of more than two men and women.' There is a confusion between these two terms in the Saudi mind. The Prophet said whenever a man and a woman are in *khalwah* Satan will join them. But *ikhtilat* is part of the Saudi tribal culture. Before I was born, in the thirties and forties men and women used to celebrate weddings together. Now bride and groom have separate wedding celebrations."

"Traditions say that eating alone with your female relatives is shameful," Raid Qusti, a journalist, wrote earlier this year in a daring column for the *Arab News*. "Where in our religion does it say that sitting with your own family is forbidden?" Qusti complained that many Saudi men thought it was taboo to utter a woman's name in public. "Ask any Saudi male in the street what the names of his wife or daughters are, and you will either have embarrassed him or insulted him. Islamic? Not in any way." There are some parts of the country where a woman never unveils—her husband and children see her face only when she dies. "Women will always be the core issue that will hinder any social progress in Saudi Arabia," Qusti wrote. "We limit their roles in public, ban them from public participation in decision making, we doubt them and confine them because we think they are the source of all seduction and evil in the world. And then we say proudly: 'We are Muslims.'"

A middle-aged Saudi told me, "I am worried about the next generation. They don't see any real women at all. You don't see each other's wives, daughters, sisters. Everything is masculine. And yet they are bombarded by images. They can easily see porn. They live in the imagination of sex all the time. We don't grow naturally, to be loved, not to be loved—we don't undergo these changes. Two-thirds of the marriages here are basically loveless. Many men cheat—there's a lot going on underground."

Some Saudi men openly joke about their behavior when they leave the country. "We're all sex maniacs, by the way," one said to me. He regularly flies to Morocco for female companionship. "There's a part of me that I share with all men, where women are concerned. And there's a part I share with Arab men. But there's a big part that only Saudi guys have in common."

The absence of socialization between men and women struck me as a potent factor in terrorist fantasies. The hijackers who killed themselves on September 11th were propelled in part by the notion of being rewarded in the afterlife with the company of virgins. Such abstractions don't seem quite so strange in a country where images of women piped through a satellite dish seem more vivid than actual Saudi women—whom the male reporters at the *Gazette* liked to call B.M.O.s, or "black moving objects."

The abaya obliterates fashion and curtains off women's bodies, but the gowns are various and full of meaning to those who can read the signs. "Some go from the head, some from the shoulder, some are open, some are closed," Najla explained to me. (We were speaking on the phone, as usual, since individual meetings between the two of us would have been frowned upon.) Sabahat's gown, she pointed out, buttoned up the front and had an attractive embroidered trim. There are others that look a bit like opera capes, with stylish hoods. Najla wears a closed abaya that is like a cotton poncho and is called a *baltu*. "My *baltu* is my personal design," Najla said. Every year, she goes to a tailor to have a new one made. "I always try to make it more conservative," she said. "A few years ago, I saw some abayas with a covering for the hands. I added that." She used to cover her entire face as well, but her glasses made that impractical, so she wears the *niqab*, a covering that goes over her nose and under the gold rims of her cat's-eye glasses. "By the way, some people think we make faces under the veil—and we do," she confided.

"Why do you cover your face at all?" I asked.

"In the world of male prejudice, why not?" she said. Another time, she told me, "I just don't like people staring at me."

She began wearing the abaya when she was about fourteen. She gave it up when she came to the United States to study, although she continued to wear the head scarf, with a long shirt and long pants. When Najla returned home, she adopted the full veil. "There's not any other girl in my family who has done what I did," she said. "They uncover their faces, they shake men's hands. I don't."

Before going to America, she studied biology at King Faisal University, in Dammam, living in a dorm, her window facing a high wall so that no one could see in. "After *maghreb*, the sunset prayers, I'd get really sad," she recalled. "I couldn't live there any longer. I was spending time learning English just to get my family to agree to let me go to America to get my degree. I didn't want to come back to Jeddah, because I was afraid they would make me marry someone I didn't like."

Hearing Najla's stories, I pictured her parents clenching their teeth as they dealt with this strong-willed daughter. "After three years in King Faisal, I said to my family, 'No more!' I quit school and came home. They said, 'Get married.' I said no." Her brothers were in America and she wanted to go, too. Najla's parents agreed to let her finish her bachelor's degree in Kentucky. "My first interest was in politics," she continued. "I spoke to my dad. He said, 'You won't go into politics—I won't spend a penny on you!' " Reluctantly, she began studying microbiology.

After she got her bachelor's degree, Najla wanted to remain in the States for more study, but her family ordered her home to get married. "It was to someone I really didn't want," she said. She had never had a date in her life. The marriage ended quickly. "I had a divorce. I forced him to do that."

Divorce is a drastic step in a country where women's lives are so circumscribed. Without a man in their home, divorced women are shunned in Saudi society. As a consequence, they tend to form their own community; there is even a road in Riyadh called the Street of Divorcées. Nonetheless, a recent study found that more than twenty per cent of Saudi marriages end in divorce within a year. Saudi marriages suffer from all the usual afflictions—infidelity, incompatibility, household violence—but the biggest problem is polygamy. In Islam, a man is allowed up to four wives at a time, and many Saudi husbands continually change partners, a practice that causes constant heartache.

Having ended her marriage, Najla continued to push for independence. "I got out of microbiology," she said. "I thought, It's my life. I'm going to do what I want. I'm going to be a politician, no matter what other people think." She went back to Kentucky and got a master's degree in political science.

I asked her what she understood politics to mean in a country with no political system. She said that she was referring to something like social work. "It's a term I use," she said. Speaking of her *Gazette* work, she said, "This job might not be at the level of what I understand a 'politician' is." She added, "As a journalist, there are so many ways you can push society forward. But is it effective?" Another time, she admitted, "I no longer know what I want."

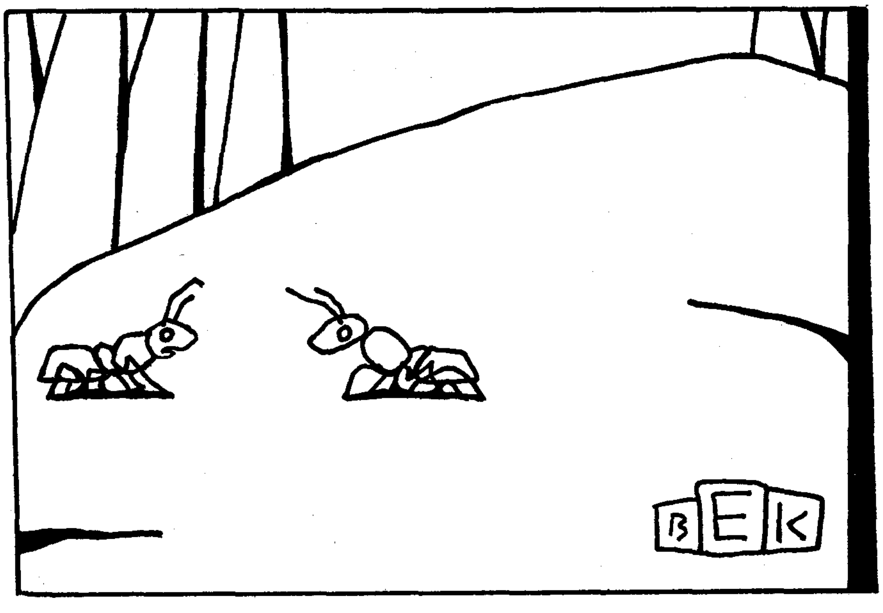
Najla travels quite freely, although she needs her father's written permission to leave town. Her family has a driver, but Najla doesn't like him, so within Jeddah she usually goes by cab. Either way, she thinks that it is improper to be confined in the same vehicle with a man. At the very least, she believes, there should be a partition between the woman and the driver. The best solution, she says, is allowing women to drive. "We have to pay for drivers," she said. "This is a burden on women."

Until 1990, there was no law forbidding women to drive—the social prohibition was sufficient. That year, more than two hundred thousand American troops—including women G.I.s who drove trucks and jeeps—arrived in the kingdom to repel the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Fifty Saudi women decided that it was the right time to challenge tradition. They met in front of a Safeway in Riyadh and ordered their drivers out of their cars, then took a thirty-minute spin through the capital. The police detained them, but there was no legal reason to arrest them. The Interior Minister immediately banned the practice. The Grand Mufti at the time, Abdul-Aziz bin Baz, helpfully added a fatwa, calling female driving a source of depravity. The female drivers' passports were seized, and those who were employed lost their jobs. Several of them had been professors in the women's college of King Saud University, and the King himself suspended them after their own female students protested that they did not want to be taught by "infidels."

On a warm Saturday morning, I went to the beach with Hasan Hatrash, Hasan Baswaid, and Mamdouh al-Harthy. They took me to a secluded compound north of town, run by the Sheraton. It was designated for Westerners, but nearly everyone there was Arab; it was one of the few places in Jeddah where men and women could mix freely. Hatrash brought his guitar, and a keyboard for me. We spent the day jamming, playing blues and reggae tunes beside the Red Sea. At one point, Hatrash launched into "Redemption Song," by Bob Marley. "Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery," he sang. "None but ourselves can free our minds."

Then we had a barbecue with a mixed group of their friends. After dinner, someone brought out an oud, the Arabian lute. Hatrash picked up a drum; Hasan Baswaid took over the keyboard; and the music took a sinuous turn. We sat there till late at night, men and women together, enjoying the light breeze wafting across the water from Africa—a fleeting vision of what Saudi Arabia could be like without the enforced piety that holds the sexes apart.

One afternoon, I was in the Al Mamlaka mall, in Riyadh, waiting with other shoppers for the stores to open after sunset prayers. A group of Filipinos who were hanging out in front of Planet Hollywood abruptly rushed away, like a flock of ducks taking flight. Behind them came a *muttawa'a*. He was a squat man with a wide, red face and a black beard down to his chest. Over his shortened *thobe* he wore a sheer black *mashlah*, a ceremonial robe, with gold piping on the sleeves. As



"The other side of the rock is supposed to be beautiful at this time of year."

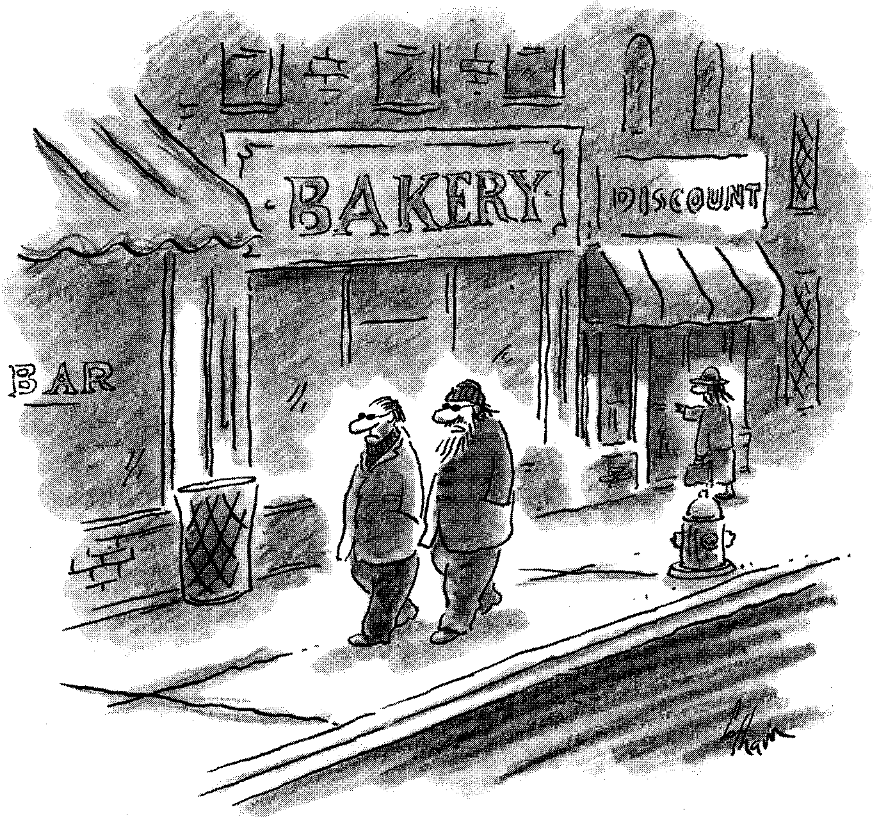
he walked, he leaned backward into his authority, his thumbs stuck in the lapels of his *mashlah*. On either side of him, and a step behind, were two Saudi policemen; they were comical bookends, tall and skinny, with berets and stringy fundamentalist beards. I decided to follow them around the mall, which has four stories, the top floor for women only. We circumnavigated the complex as the *muttawa'a* shooed the men to a nearby mosque, reprimanded women whose attire failed to conform to his standards, peeked in store windows at decapitated mannequins to make sure that no surreptitious shopping was taking place, and looked in restaurants to make certain that they were closed for prayers.

Later, I asked Prince Alwaleed bin Talal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the mall's owner, who is one of the richest men in the world, about the bullying *muttawa'a*. "I personally talked to the boss of that chap, who was a bit on the rough side," he told me. "If you talk to their leaders, they are logical, pragmatic people. I said, 'Your guys are scaring the heck out of people.' He gave them orders to change."

The religious police often seem intent on making themselves ridiculous: they will randomly black out faces in advertisements in the malls so that a men's store will feature a headless photograph of a man in a Hugo Boss suit, while posters in a nearby Gap are untouched. Yet most Saudis fear the *muttawa'a*. The week before Valentine's Day, the *muttawa'a* began going through card and flower shops, attacking anything that was red or had hearts on it; florists hid their roses as if they were contraband.

A number of Saudis told me that many of the *muttawa'a* are ex-convicts who would be unemployable except for the fact that in prison they memorized the Koran. They receive a bounty from the government for every arrest they make: reportedly, three hundred dollars for every Saudi, and half that for a foreigner. One Jeddah resident described them as "an occupying force." He told me that they had recently burst in on the graduation ceremony of his daughter's French elementary school and ordered the children to stop singing "Alouette."

One evening in Riyadh, I was climbing into a cab when I noticed something highly unusual: a woman standing on the corner with her head uncovered. She was remarkably beautiful, and looked directly at me. I could see that she was frightened. I almost asked if I could give her a lift, but that would have been an unthinkable breach of custom: as an unmarried couple in the same car, we could both be taken to jail. So I said nothing. My cab had to make a U-turn, and when we came back past the corner I saw the woman running. She now had the hood of her abaya over her hair. She ran to a shop and tried to open the door, but it was closed for prayers. Then I saw that she was being trailed by a Suburban with the emblem of the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice on the door. The woman went from door to door, banging on the glass. Every instinct in me cried out to help her, yet I could think of nothing that would not make the situation worse. I rode on, feeling guilty and helpless, as the *muttawa'a* closed in.



"I used to be an idealist, but now I'm an independent."

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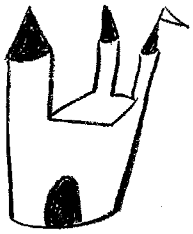
At times, the main target of the *muttawa'a's* energy seemed to be not virtue but love. Boys and girls are kept strictly separate throughout their education, and the *muttawa'a* patrol public places, trying to keep romance at bay. Flirting takes place in opportunistic bursts, at stoplights or in the mall, where telephone numbers are furtively exchanged. Some young people adopt riskier strategies. To see his girlfriend in public, Mamdouh, the Bedouin reporter, dressed up in an abaya. "I do it all the time," he confessed.

Hasan Baswaid told me that the best way to get around the *muttawa'a* and meet girls was through the Internet. He had met a nice girl in a chat room, and he began talking with her on the telephone. Finally, they arranged to meet in a café, each bringing a sister as an escort. They enjoyed the date, and within three months Baswaid decided to propose. The girl accepted, and there was a small engagement party, which included meeting with her relatives to haggle over the dowry. "After that, she is my wife," he told me the day of the meeting.

The next morning, Baswaid returned to the office a married man—although he and his wife couldn't live together until after a wedding ceremony, which would be held a few weeks later. We met that day in the *Okaz* cafeteria. Like most newly married men, he was a little nostalgic for his bachelor days. We began talking about parties, and he recalled a rather wild event he had attended a few years earlier. Except for the feast days at the end of Ramadan and the hajj, all holidays, including birthdays, are nominally banned in the kingdom. One year, however, he visited his cousin in Dubai, and his cousin's wife, who is American, held a Halloween masquerade.



"She wanted me to dress up like a woman," he confessed.

"And did you?"

He laughed, a little embarrassed. "I went to the party for about fifteen minutes, then said I had to leave. I went upstairs with my cousin's wife. She owns a beauty salon." The relative put Nair on his legs and shaved his arms and mustache and even his eyebrows. "At the time, I wore my hair really long. So she curled it. She gave me some panty hose and a dress with socks in the bra. And then I went downstairs." The disguise was convincing, and he began to flirt—plopping himself on a good friend's lap. Soon, of course, the guests figured out who he really was. His buddy was mad, but the women were intrigued by his role-playing. "They were, like, kissing me. They even let me come into the women's bathroom!" He had a great time, he said. "But I hated myself in the morning. I woke up with no eyebrows."

"What does your family think about you being here?" Hasan Hatrash asked me one afternoon. We were sitting on the floor of the *Gazette* newsroom having lunch—a large platter of grilled chicken and rice, which we ate with our fingers.

"They're all terrified," I admitted.

"How did we get into this situation where everybody thinks we're terrorists!" he said miserably.

The West's fear of the Arab world was mirrored by many Saudis I talked to. Young people who had been studying in the West were afraid to return there. Businessmen confessed that they would feel humiliated if they tried to travel to the United States and were fingerprinted upon entering the country. These were men who had once enjoyed the nearly universal access that a Saudi passport vouchsafed them. For most of the country's business and intellectual leaders, and for many of the royals, the Western world had been a refuge from the intellectual and sensual sterility of the kingdom. I suspected that many had nurtured a secret escape plan in case the extremists gained complete control—they would retreat to second homes in Santa Barbara or Miami. But now such places seemed hostile to them. These élite men who had prided themselves on living in two worlds felt trapped in their own stern culture, and they were suffocating.

One morning, several of the *Gazette* reporters admitted to me that they were depressed. "Last night, I didn't even sleep," Hasan Hatrash told me. "I just sat on the beach. Till four in the morning. When I do sleep, it's like I'm dead for three days."

I worried about them, especially Hatrash. He was always forgetting to eat, and during meetings he jiggled his leg nervously. In many respects, he was our best reporter, but music was his passion. There wasn't a place for him in a society that smothered art and other pleasures. The fact that he was in his late twenties, lived at home, and couldn't meet women—and couldn't afford to marry one if he did—also weighed on him.

In the *Gazette*, Baswaid reported on a survey of more than two thousand students in Jeddah, aged thirteen to twenty-five, that was conducted by a researcher at King Abdul Aziz University. Sixty-five per cent of the boys and seventy-two per cent of the girls showed symptoms of depression; seven per cent of the girls admitted that they had attempted suicide (more than twice the rate of the boys). Drug use was nearly five per cent for both sexes, as was the rate of alcoholism. "Five per cent alcoholism among intermediate and high-school students in an Islamic country is jarring to our ears," Dr. Saud Hasan Mukhtar, a professor at the university, told Baswaid.

One afternoon, I went to the gym near my apartment and started doing yoga exercises. A Saudi man saw me doing a headstand; he walked over, bent down, and cranked his head sideways.

"Is that good for depression?" he asked.

"It might be," I said.

"Can you show me how to do it?"

I helped him up against a wall, and after a while he learned to hold the position. When I went back to the locker room, it was prayer time, and four men happened to be praying on the floor directly facing my locker. I waited for them to finish. One of them asked me afterward if I would start a yoga class. "Maybe it will help relieve the stress," he said.

Such polite entreaties caught me off guard. Before arriving in Saudi Arabia, I had expected loud confrontations that went on into the night, as I had experienced in Cairo in the spring of 2002. But there was little of the natural exuberance, humor, and mischief that are so much a part of the Egyptian character. What I found instead was quiet despair, an ominous emotional flatness.

In March, a soft-spoken retired chemistry professor invited me to have lunch at his house, in Riyadh. The place was impressive; it had marble floors, and two large public rooms with the chairs pushed against the wall, in the Islamic style. I learned that his wife and daughters would be joining us—an extraordinarily kind and open gesture for such a conservative man.

The presentation of a Saudi family is a careful ritual. The protocol begins with the entry of the youngest son, who in this case was an officer in the Saudi Air Force and a veteran of the Gulf War. After we chatted for a few minutes, the older son, a banker, joined us. Then the father came in, and accepted a kiss on the top of his head from his older son. They invited me to the kitchen to eat, rather than the dining room, which was an honor. The professor's wife appeared and sat down at the head of a long table, and we began to eat from eight huge platters of food. Then, one by one, his four grown daughters and daughters-in-law came to the table. They were all intelligent, well educated, and hospitable, and the conversation was so agreeable that I was unprepared for the argument that followed.

The professor began talking about the black boxes in the hijacked planes that had struck the World Trade Center. He questioned the Americans' claim that they had not survived. Then he spoke about the unsolved anthrax poisonings that followed the attack, suggesting that it was the United States government that had carried them out, to scare people.

"What kind of country do you think

we are?" I said heatedly. "Do you think we are really so wicked that we would poison our own citizens?"

"You have gotten angry in my house," the professor said, offended.

The conversation inevitably turned toward the notion that the Mossad or the C.I.A. had engineered the hijackings. The logic is based on two assumptions: that these organizations were scheming for an excuse to attack the Arab world, and that Arabs are too incompetent to have pulled off the attacks. I had had the same discussion countless times, although the Saudis who voiced this view didn't seem to hold on to it with the same tenacity as Egyptians I had met the year before.

"Let's ask your son," I suggested, when the professor said that none of the hijackers had sufficient training to handle a commercial airliner. "Let's ask the pilot how hard it is."

The officer looked at his father and said, "To ram a skyscraper on a cloudless day? I should think it would be the easiest thing in the world."

The room was quiet—the family stunned, I think, that the youngest son would openly contradict his father. "Do you accept his testimony?" I gently asked the father, but he only turned away.

I had the sense that the generations were engaged in a struggle over the future of the country, but it was not at all clear that the young had a better vision of what needed to be done. I went one evening to a *diwaniyya*, a weekly men's dinner that is a kind of literary and political salon. We sat on the floor until past midnight, eating from platters of lamb and rice. Most of the men were professionals: lawyers, editors, doctors. "We were educated in America, and I see the world going against everything I have built," said Dr. Mujahid al-Sawwaf, a lawyer in Jeddah and a former professor at Umm al-Qura University, in Mecca. "We were always for liberalism, but some of the terrorists were my students."

"My daughter is for bin Laden," another of the men admitted. "When I go to wake her up, I see pictures of Palestinian girl martyrs on her wall. It scares me to death. If we go into her room at night, she'll be listening to Britney Spears, but as soon as we close the door she's listening to martyr songs."

The other men nodded. "They come to us and say, 'Dad, why didn't you fight in 1948 and 1967?' They see us as cowards," a dentist said.

"One of the children said to me, 'Uncle, is it true that when you went to the West you became a puppet like our leadership?' Our kids don't want to study in America, as we did."

"Bin Laden changed our life. He proved that mighty America is vulnerable. To us, we're afraid of our future, but the youth think America is on the verge of collapsing and it's time for us to fight it."

"We are afraid of our children."

On a bright April morning, I drove up to Taif, a lovely mountain town two hours outside Jeddah that is famous for its roses, and met a reporter from a Saudi business paper. We were trying to see the brother of Hani Hanjour, who is thought to have been the pilot of the airplane that crashed into the Pentagon, and we parked outside the imposing two-story marble house where Hanjour grew up. His father was a provisioner for a nearby military base.

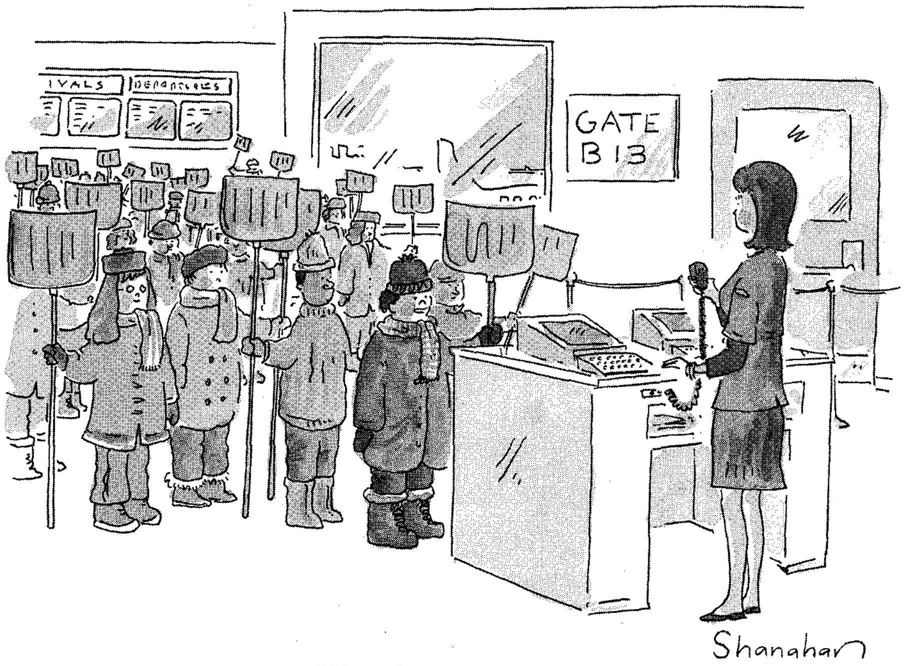
It wasn't until sometime after midnight that Yasser Hanjour came outside and got into the back seat. Slight and meek, he looked unsettlingly like his sad-eyed older brother. Yasser told me that he was in the women's garment business. As he saw it, his brother's story was a simple one. Hani had never wanted to be anything other than a pilot. He had trained in America, where he had suddenly become very religious. When he returned from his first trip there, he applied for a job at Saudi Arabian Air Lines but was turned down. He disappeared into his room for six months.

"Why was he so depressed?" I asked.

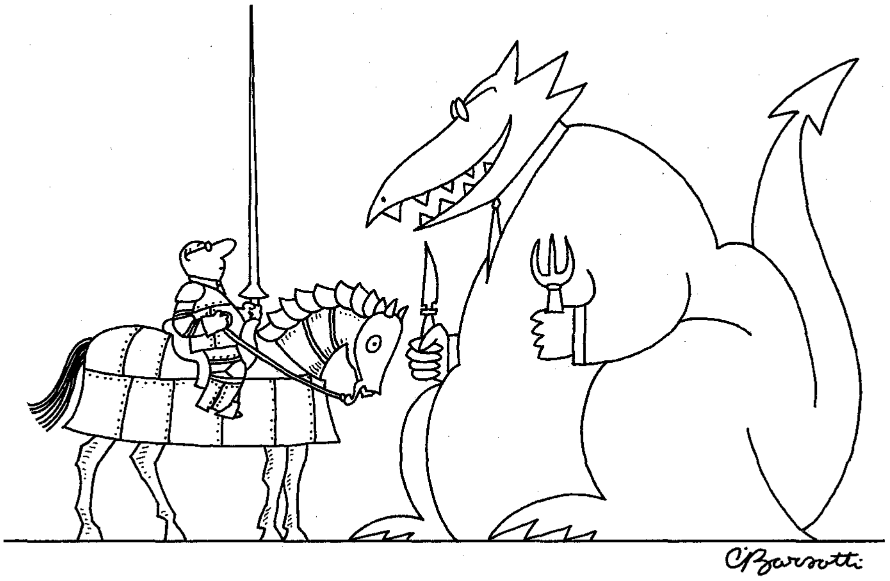
"You know the reason," the business reporter said impatiently. "This joblessness." Yasser shrugged and agreed.

There was a sameness to the stories of the hijacker pilots. They had become Muslim extremists in Europe and America—presumably as a way of holding on to their sense of who they were in the engulfing West. Their own cultures offered them no way to be powerful in the world. Traditionally, the Saudi government absorbed nearly all the university graduates, but after the oil shock of the mid-eighties the government, which became saddled with debt, could no longer hire as before. Unemployment and idleness became central facts of life for young Saudi men (as they had always been for Saudi women). Bin Laden gave young men with no control over their lives an identity, and a wanton chance to make history. "Death is better than life in humiliation!" bin Laden said.

That is a constant theme of bin Laden's speeches. One of the critical documents in understanding his goals, and his appeal, is his "Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places," writ-



"Shovel your runway?"



"Oh, good, you brought your pony."

ten in 1996, in which he cites the sources of Arabs' shame. Although the "Declaration" calls on Muslims everywhere to fight "Jews and Crusaders," the heart of its argument is a populist attack on the mismanagement of the Saudi economy. "Everybody talks about the deterioration of the economy, about inflation, and about the ever-increasing debts," he writes. "More than three hundred and forty billion Saudi riyals are owed by the government to the people—in addition to the daily accumulated interest, let alone the foreign debt! People wonder whether we are the largest oil exporting country?! They even believe that this situation is a curse put on them by Allah for not objecting to the oppressive and illegitimate behavior and measures of the ruling regime." In a country where discontent with the ruling family is widespread but rarely expressed directly, where resentment against the power and influence of the West is nearly universal, and where unemployment is creating a class of well-educated but idle young men, bin Laden's words resonated so strongly in part because no one else would say them.

"Our society is confused," Abdullah al-Shehri, the linguistics professor, told me during another Starbucks seminar. He was from the same tribe as three of the fifteen Saudi hijackers, but that scarcely sets him apart in a country whose inhabitants are so intimately bound together. "It bothers me a lot when I see things about our society that are negative or backward, which in the West are blamed on religion. You can easily look back at Muslim history, at the Umayyads and the Abbasids, and see how powerful Islamic culture was back then. What has changed is the mentality and the culture. Islam is a religion of tolerance, but now there is a sense of frustration and defeat that makes people hate others. For some, hate becomes their only weapon. If you can't beat them, hate them."

"From now on, you should be Mr. Sewage," I said to Hasan Hatrash, who was not quite persuaded. "It will make your career. This is a 'Holy shit!' story, I guarantee you."

He laughed. "Yeah, I see your point, mon," he said.

The sewage story would require Hatrash, who had never finished college, to learn about geology, epidemiology, sewage treatment, dams, city building codes, and legal procedures. He was intimidated, but he was also a quick study. His self-taught English was so fluent that he could pass for an American (or a Jamaican). He also spoke passable Japanese and German. He began to explore the story cautiously, not entirely trusting my enthusiasm. What was the point of writing an exposé in a country where it couldn't be published?

I took him to interview Hussein Shobokshi, the contractor who had originally told me about the sewage problem. He received us in a dark office whose walls were covered with beautiful examples of Arabic calligraphy. I pulled out my legal pad and my tape recorder; Hatrash took a folded sheet of notebook paper from the pocket of his *thobe*. I asked Shobokshi why he was bothering to sue Jeddah's former director of sewage. Saudi courts have always been protective of government officials.

"Hyundai won a case against the Ministry of Public Works," Shobokshi told us. "So that got me thinking, Maybe the judicial system is willing to raise the bar a bit. We began collecting testimonials. It's been my crusade."

Shobokshi started cataloguing the costs of the sewage crisis: real-estate prices have dropped by seventy per cent in some districts; the beaches are polluted and marine life is dying; sewage is eating into the city's limestone bedrock. He gave us references for medical sources and environmental studies, including one commissioned by the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry that he said warned of a hepatitis epidemic. "We will see people dying, and buildings will collapse. It will certainly get worse before it gets better."

When we left Shobokshi's office, Hatrash was excited. He began talking about all the sources he was going to interview. I asked to see his notes. I could see some figures—more than sixty per cent of the palm trees were dying, for instance—scribbled on the folded paper, but the texture of Shobokshi's conversation was missing. I gave him a little lecture about the importance of capturing quotes and then sent him off to pursue the story.

Meanwhile, I went to speak with Ramesh Balan, the managing editor of the *Gazette*. A non-Muslim from southern India, he darts around the newsroom like a hummingbird, and he talks faster than he moves. If you could hold him in place for a moment, you would observe a dashing, graying man in his mid-forties. One day, he emerged from his office and cried, "Look at this!" He was waving a copy of the *Arab News*. The headline reported the arrest of eight Al Qaeda suspects involved in a January shoot-out in Riyadh. "Local coverage, here on the front page!" he said with jealousy. "I'm going to retaliate."

Ramesh handed me a bunch of letters to the editor and said that perhaps they would inspire an assignment. I came across a handwritten letter from a Saudi soldier. "Please help us," it said. The writer complained that all the soldiers in his unit had just seen their salaries cut in half.

I called Hasan Baswaid over to my desk. "Do you know anybody in the military?" I asked.

Baswaid nodded. He had more connections than anyone else in the office. I handed him the soldier's letter. "Why don't you call around and see if other soldiers are having their salaries cut? This could be a big story."

Baswaid quickly set the letter back on my desk. He put his hands together as if he were in handcuffs. "This could put you in the calaboose," he said with a sheepish grin. A little while later, however, he came by my desk and told me of a rumor that had washed over the city: the bin Ladens were changing their name.

"They're going to call themselves 'A'wadh,' " he said. It was Osama bin Laden's grandfather's name. Their motivation for making the change was understandable—if it was true.

"Hasan, get this story and your byline will be on the front page of every paper in the world."

Baswaid shrugged and gave me a look.

"Let me worry about getting it published," I said. "Do you think you can get someone to confirm it?"

Baswaid became very sober. "I know his son Abdullah a little," he said.

"Can you talk to him?"

"Maybe."

Baswaid started making calls on his mobile phone. Meanwhile, I went to visit Ramesh. He was smarting from a confrontation with Dr. Ahmed Al-Yusuf, the *Gazette's* editor-in-chief, a man I saw only rarely. Ramesh said that he had wanted to run a big story about Libya withdrawing its ambassador to the kingdom after a clash between Muammar Qaddafi and Crown Prince Abdullah at an Arab League meeting. Dr. Yusuf ordered that the story be played down. "He doesn't know what real press freedom is!" Ramesh said. He took a few deep breaths. "I'm about to have a nervous breakdown!"

I told him about Hasan Baswaid's story. "Will you print it?" I asked.

"If they don't print it, I'll quit!" he exclaimed. He suddenly seemed exhilarated. Ramesh then offered me an exciting piece of information: the sewage workers in Jeddah were on strike. We both felt a little giddy. We could envision the *Gazette* front page with the bin Laden name change, a city sewage strike, and a reference to the withdrawal of the Libyan ambassador—what a news day!

I sent Hasan Hatrash off to the municipal yard where the sewage trucks typically gathered. "The drivers aren't on strike," he reported. "They are afraid, because the police are impounding their trucks." As a result, the drivers were staying home, letting the waste build up.

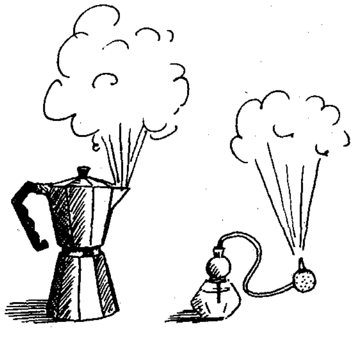
"Why in the world would they do that?"

Hatrash said he would find out, but it was already after ten o'clock, and the paper's deadline was only an hour away. Meanwhile, Baswaid was standing at my desk expectantly. "I found Abdullah bin Laden," he told me. "He's having dinner right now at the Italian restaurant."

The restaurant was in a strip shopping center off Medina Road, about twenty minutes away—less, given Baswaid's driving, which I decided to think of as a kind of video game. There was a small patio in front of the restaurant, and four young men were seated at a table, laughing. Baswaid and I entered with studied casual chatter, planning to make it all seem natural. Abdullah and two of his friends wore *thobes;* the other friend was in jeans and wore a rasta hat. All were in their middle twenties.

We sat down at a table next to theirs, and Abdullah took no apparent notice. He was tall and clean-shaven and his head was uncovered. His hair was close-cropped, almost stubbly; his nose was long and flat, like his father's. The mild eyes were the same.

Baswaid got up and went inside the restaurant, then returned to the patio with a pack of cigarettes. He pretended to have just recognized Abdullah, and walked over, smiling. A few pleasantries were exchanged, then Abdullah turned to be introduced to me. In the Saudi style, he brushed my hand and touched his heart.



Baswaid asked the question. Abdullah denied the rumor. "It's my name, and I am very proud of it. There is no way to change it," he said. He didn't sound plaintive or embarrassed.

"Should we do a story anyway?" Baswaid asked as we watched the young men getting into an S.U.V. with darkened windows. I suggested that Baswaid continue to ask around, to find out, for instance, if the Saudi Binladin Group, the family construction company, was changing its name. There was still a possibility that the family would seek the change on their passports, but more reporting would be required before the story could run.

The next morning, the *Gazette's* front page did carry Hasan Hatrash's story, headlined "JEDDAH SEWAGE DISPOSAL STOPS." The drivers were perplexed, he reported. "We don't know why the cops are harassing us," one said. Homeowners were already complaining of overflowing septic tanks that were flooding the city streets. In a single skillful anecdote, Hasan caught the sense of a disaster in the making:

> Irfan Khan, an Indian, who had just got back from work to find his ground-floor apartment in a total mess from overflowing toilets, was livid with rage. "Come, look at my carpets, my kitchen—how will I ever live here now!" he raved.
>
> "Get back in!" he broke off to yell at two children wanting to try out the stepping stones dotting a cesspool on the street. "Now there'll be mosquitoes and disease—and already there is a Dengue fever scare in the city!"

By the time the article appeared, the impact of the sewage problem was obvious throughout Jeddah. In many places, the streets were wet; hideous lakes were forming out of gurgling spouts. Nevertheless, no other newspaper had taken notice of the crisis.

Hatrash then learned that the police were confiscating the trucks because the drivers hadn't paid a new disposal fee at the sewage pond. At my urging, Hatrash tracked down the idle drivers. He came back and wrote a story that began, "Police have impounded trucks in the past week because of a failure to remit a new disposal fee."

"How much is the fee?" I asked.

"Five riyals."

"This whole city is drowning in shit because of five riyals? Hasan, paint the picture! Sewage collection has stopped. Toilets are overflowing. The streets are turning into lakes of excrement. And why?"

"All because of a measly five riyals!"

Hatrash went back to work. The story was terrific. The police had been pressured by the mayor's office to confiscate the trucks of the drivers who refused to pay the new fee. But the drivers were being forced to pay out of their own pockets, and many of them scarcely had enough to cover their gas. Sewage from the streets was streaming into people's houses, and although homeowners were willing to pay any amount for service, the drivers were afraid of losing their trucks. The health department warned about the danger of hepatitis, but the mayor's office refused comment, saying simply that the problem would "end soon."

For the first time, the *Gazette* was looking like a real newspaper. The headline of Hasan's next article was "MUNICIPALITY CAVES IN—SEWAGE DISPOSAL RESUMES IN JEDDAH." Strangely, we were again the only paper to carry the story.

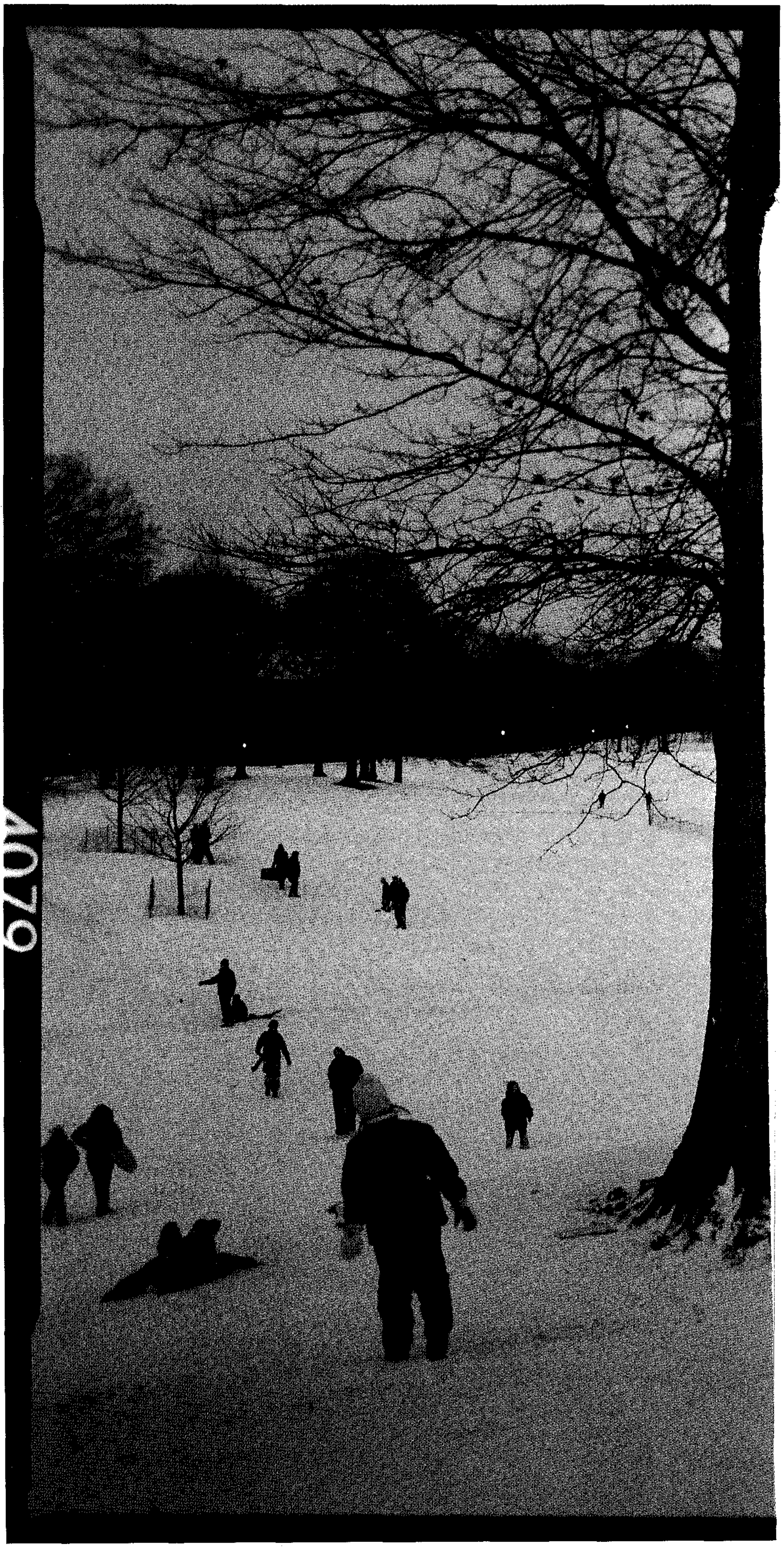
Within a week, the drivers were idled once more, over the same dispute. "I just learned something interesting," Hatrash told me one morning. I was gleefully reading his latest piece, titled "PROBLEM OVER, SAYS MAYOR, AS JEDDAH SINKS IN SEWAGE." There was a full page of photographs showing impassable puddles in the streets and flooded front yards. "I have a source who tells me that the decision to impose the new fee came from the governor, Prince Abdul Aziz bin Majid," he continued. "The Prince sent a letter ordering this new plan to be implemented. They wanted the five-riyal toll to pay for the new sewage dam." The twenty-five-million-riyal dam, which would back up the existing one, was to be built by the Saudi Binladin Group.

Hatrash said he had spoken to a geologist who pointed out that the new concrete dam was potentially worse than the old sand one, because it would expand the reservoir and add significant pressure to the earthquake fault that ran directly below it. One great tremor would let loose a torrent of sludge that could turn Jeddah into a modern Pompeii.

"Let's make a story out of it," I said.

"It would be such a relief to tell the truth," Hatrash said.

That didn't happen. Once the rumors about the Prince's involvement began to



DASHING THROUGH THE SNOW *Sledding in the Long Meadow, in Prospect Pa*

MAGNUM

rooklyn, on the evening of December 7th, after more than a foot of snow fell on the city. Photograph by Gilles Peress.

circulate, the story died. We soon learned that not only was the Prince behind the five-riyal toll but he was fronting a new company that proposed to build a sewer system for the city, which would cost the kingdom twenty billion riyals. None of this information, however, ended up in the *Gazette*. The editor-in-chief would never print it. Meanwhile, the truck contractors were forced to pay the fee, and the immediate crisis passed—but the Prince paid no political price for endangering the health of the citizens and despoiling the city.

A few weeks later, the *Gazette* received a tantalizing letter—a plea from a group of Indian taxi-drivers. Fifty of them had been brought to the kingdom seven years before with the promise of office jobs in private companies and a guaranteed monthly wage of six hundred riyals. (They included a copy of the contract with their letter.) Upon their arrival, the employer seized their passports and their residence permits, and told them that they actually would be "limousine drivers"—that is, cabbies—and that, rather than receiving a wage, they would be required to pay rent on their taxis. Some of the men didn't even have a driver's license, but they were all thrown out onto the chaotic streets of Jeddah. After enduring a series of indignities, including beatings, fifteen of the men had gone on strike. The men were crowded into a hovel, stranded, hungry—virtual prisoners.

There is no clear figure on how many expats (as all foreign workers are called) are in the kingdom—four million, nine million, nobody knows—but very few people know how many Saudis there are, either. "Since King Faisal's census in the sixties, the actual population figure has been a state secret," a source close to the Interior Ministry told me. "The King saw the figure was low, and he immediately doubled it." According to C.I.A. statistics, the native population is about nineteen million, but the actual number of Saudis may be as few as ten million. Certainly one has the feeling, in the cities at least, that there are almost as many expats as Saudis.

Expats hold seven out of ten jobs in the kingdom, and ninety per cent of all private-sector positions. A 1999 study revealed that they sent home about fourteen billion dollars that year. For decades, the Saudi government has been attempting to replace foreigners with native workers, but it has run into resistance from employers who don't want to hire their own people. "Saudis aren't qualified," Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Adbul Aziz, the secretary-general for tourism, told me. "Showing up for a job is not a priority for them. Even the culture of working as a team is not there." Increasingly, the unemployed natives tend to view the Bangladeshi houseboys, the Lebanese waiters, and the Egyptian barbers with resentment rather than gratitude. "We hate it!" a Saudi friend exclaimed when I asked how he felt when he had to speak English or Urdu just to order coffee. Entry-level service jobs, however, are forms of employment that Saudis refuse to accept.

The expat readership of the *Gazette* would, I thought, see the Indian-cabbie story in a sympathetic light. I arranged for three of the drivers who had signed the letter to come to the *Gazette* offices to talk to Faisal Bajaber, a smart Indian reporter who had just graduated from high school. The cabdrivers were led by Nainan Philopose, a small, intense man in a dirty shirt; he arrived carrying a file of documents. He had the bearing of a man who is not easily intimidated. His wife was desperately ill in India, he told us. He had planned to visit her, but, when he sought his passport from his employer, company goons had dragged him to a detention center for illegal aliens. The owner of the limousine company beat him in front of several immigration officers. Philopose and some other men had complained to the Indian Embassy about their treatment, to no effect. Because they were expats, they had no real legal standing in the country. Their employer had made them sign documents in Arabic that they couldn't read, as well as some blank sheets of paper. One of the drivers told Faisal that the owner of the company had his own jail, where he locked up drivers who defied him.

I watched Faisal interviewing the drivers in Urdu. Although he had lived nearly his entire life in the kingdom, Faisal was not allowed to attend the public universities, because he didn't have Saudi citizenship. And yet he spoke five languages; his English was nearly flawless. He asked detailed questions and took careful notes. He had the makings of an excellent journalist.

Faisal presented the story at a reporters' meeting. Dr. Shoukany listened sleepily until he heard that the owner of the limousine company had a private jail. Then he nearly jumped out of his chair. "He's not a prince, is he?" he asked. "No? Well, we'll go after him!"

After several weeks, Faisal produced a draft. The owner of the limousine company had dodged him, saying only that the drivers were lying. Now the drivers and the owner were headed for labor court, where such disputes are nearly always resolved in favor of the Saudi employers. Faisal called me to say that there was a problem with the story.

I went into Ramesh's office to find Faisal and Dr. Yusuf, the editor-in-chief, who was reading the draft. The reporters were frightened of him. He was a slight man with shrewd eyes and an unexpected giggle, but he had an unguarded temper and he didn't mind humiliating his employees. Yusuf wasn't really a newsman—he was a former professor of advertising—but I tried to appeal to his sense of community. There really was no reason for the *Gazette* to exist if it didn't address the kinds of concerns detailed in the cabdriver story.

Yusuf waved the draft dismissively and observed that Faisal hadn't talked to the Indian Embassy. That seemed a small, if valid, point. Faisal had a letter registering a complaint by the Embassy on behalf of the drivers. Yusuf also noted that the court hearing was the following morning. "We don't want to put pressure on the government," he said.

"What's wrong with that?" I asked.

Yusuf explained that the cabdrivers would pay the price for any quixotic effort on our part to champion their case. Then he handed the story back to Faisal. I protested a bit, but walked out compliantly. Maybe Dr. Yusuf was right. I didn't want the penniless cabdrivers to be punished because of my principles. I recalled the story of Abd al-Karim Mara'i al-Naqshabandi, a Syrian expat worker who had been sentenced to death for allegedly practicing witchcraft against his employer, a nephew of King Fahd. The evidence against him was absurd. Human-rights workers jumped on the case, when they discovered that Naqshabandi's employer had wanted him to falsely testify against another employee, and, when he refused, made the witchcraft charge. Naqshabandi became a cause célèbre, but he was preëmptorily beheaded—a grisly message to outsiders who meddled in Saudi affairs.

The next day, the cabdrivers went to labor court. Faisal told me that the Arabic document that they had signed when they first arrived in the kingdom released the owner from any financial liability. The owner also produced other documents, apparently made up from the blank sheets of paper the drivers had signed, which said that they owed him several thousand riyals each.

"What will happen to them now?" I asked.

"They're going to prison," he told me.

Faisal's story on the drivers never appeared.

"See that building?" a lawyer said to me under his breath as we drove down Tahlia Street. He indicated with his eyes a large two-story structure at the corner of Medina Road. "That's the political jail." There was nothing notable about it except for the absence of shops or signs on the ground floor. I didn't see any obvious security forces around it. The lawyer said that he had had clients detained there in the past.

"Who's in there now?" I asked.

"Who knows?"

The nature and the scope of the repression were hard to calculate. I did encounter frequent roadblocks, designed mainly to trap illegal residents. American intelligence officials had told me to expect that the Saudis would monitor my phone calls and e-mails—and even break into my apartment and clone my computer. So I was on guard.

In contrast with Egypt, where nearly everyone knew somebody who had been illegally arrested, and often tortured, in Saudi Arabia few people could say that they knew someone who had been detained for political reasons. Jeddah residents were always looking over their shoulders, but had only vague rumors to report when I pressed them.

I did meet a man who had been tortured by the Saudi secret police ten years before. "They tickled me here," he said, showing me his hands, which were scarred by knife wounds. They thought he had helped a dissident escape the country. "If I knew how to do that, I would escape myself!" he had told them.

"You are being watched," a *Gazette* editor once told me. He spoke to me in a stairwell, where he assumed we wouldn't be overheard.

"How do you know?"

"A man came this morning from the secret police to see Dr. Yusuf. After this, Dr. Yusuf called me in to ask about you."

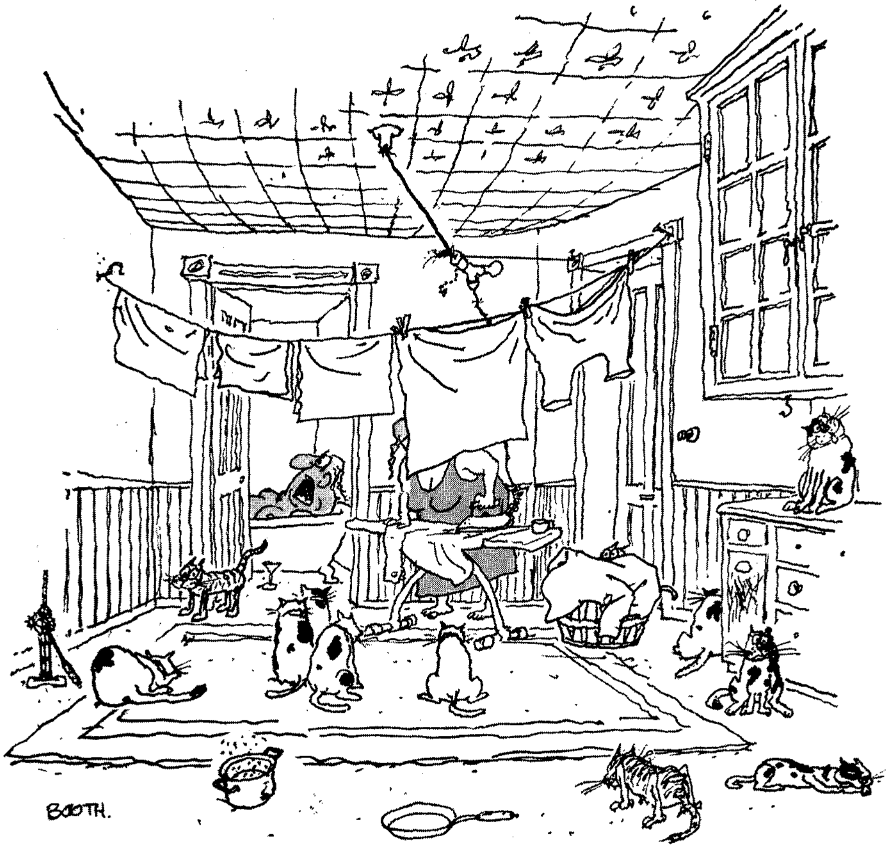
I asked what Dr. Yusuf wanted to know. "How you were doing, what you were up to," the editor said.

That didn't sound so sinister. Dr. Yusuf repeatedly asked about my welfare and kindly expressed concern for my safety, especially since, during my stay, several Westerners were assassinated. No one from the Ministry of Information came to see me, no minders were assigned, and if anyone could follow me in Jeddah traffic he represented a force beyond reckoning.

But suspicion darkened the atmosphere in Saudi Arabia, even among people who worked together every day. I asked Mahmoud Shukri, a seventeen-year-old reporter, where his friends were going to school. "We don't tell each other things like that," he said. When he asked my advice about college plans, we had to meet outside the office, to avoid being overheard. "If you let people know what you are up to, they might be envious," he explained. Telephone numbers were especially hard to obtain. One of the more experienced *Gazette* reporters kept an old ledger with handwritten numbers he had compiled over the years; it was perhaps the most valuable document in the entire office, given the reluctance of many Saudis to be listed.

By now, I had begun to look at Saudi society as a collection of opposing forces: the liberals against the religious conservatives, the royal family versus democratic reformers, the unemployed against the expats, the old against the young, men against women. The question is whether the anger that results from all this conflict will be directed outward, at the West, or inward, at the Saudi regime.

I went to the Ministry of Interior, in Riyadh, hoping to gain permission to talk to members of Saudi intelligence who had investigated the September 11th hijackers. The ministry is one of the largest branches of the Saudi government, with half a million employees. Its build-



"You'll be sorry you made that crack if I win the lottery."

ing is a giant inverted pyramid, which looms like a Death Star on the edge of downtown Riyadh. I was told that the architect was a poet, and that the building was a structural catastrophe. It certainly projects an air of menace. Inside the marble atrium, black tubular elevator columns rise through the interior balconies. The summit of this upside-down building is a dome with an eight-pointed star.

My appointment was with Dr. Sa'id al-Harthi, who was an adviser to the Interior Minister and the chairman of the board of *Okaz*—and therefore at the top of the *Gazette* masthead. All lines of power in the Saudi press converge in this building. I had been promised an interview with Prince Naif, the Interior Minister, and had prepared a long list of questions about the hijackers. A year after September 11th, the Prince had asserted that Zionists were behind the plot. "I cannot still believe that nineteen youths, including Saudis, carried out the September 11th attacks with the support of bin Laden," he said. "It's impossible." Then, in February, Saudi police rounded up more than ninety Al Qaeda suspects; nevertheless, Prince Naif maintained that there was no terrorist threat in Saudi Arabia. It seemed like a bizarre blindness on the part of the man charged with protecting the kingdom, and I was eager to hear his explanation.

Dr. Harthi had other ideas, however. He wanted to talk only about the *Gazette*. He asked me what I thought could help sales. "The circulation has shrunk to nearly nothing," he said. He had a copy of the paper on his desk and glanced at it without actually reading it. "I think the name is the problem," he continued. " '*Saudi Gazette*' sounds like a government publication."

I told him that it would sell more copies if it were a better paper—if it covered local news and took more courageous editorial stands.

"I don't think that Prince Naif would really be that helpful to you," Dr. Harthi said. It took a moment for me to realize that he had abruptly cancelled my appointment.

A few hours after I visited the ministry, a house blew up in central Riyadh. Later that night, I was having a *sheesha*—flavored tobacco in a water pipe—with one of Naif's assistants and asked about it. "Some guy, he had a lot of explosives in his house, and it blew up," he said unconcernedly. It seemed far more ominous to me.

THE SLEEPWALKER

Like an axe-head sunk in a stump,
His face is wedged into the pillow's dark,
The nose and mouth scarcely breathing,
The mind without a picture.

But now a window shade
Floats inward, to admit the ashen moonlight,
Hovers, and then in haste falls back
To crash against the screen.

In a room like this, a harrowing
Dream takes shape, although he can't yet tell
Whether abductors keep him here
Or foes without besiege him.

Afoot now in that dream,
He moves through half-familiar shapes, through shapes
Made vague as if by attic dust
Or oxides undersea,

I wanted to see how the law worked in the kingdom, so in April I asked Hasan Baswaid to do a story on a new legal code, put into effect in May, 2002, which guarantees defendants the right to consult with an attorney. It also contains a prohibition against torture. The kingdom had been struggling to conform to international legal standards in order to succeed in its bid to join the World Trade Organization. There are only about seven hundred judges in the entire country, all of whom are trained exclusively in Sharia, or Islamic law.

Baswaid landed an interview with Khalid Abu Rashid, a prominent attorney, and I went along. I asked if the new code was creating a class of Western-style criminal-defense attorneys. "Here our cases are very simple, not complicated like in America," Rashid told us. "We have been mainly concerned with financial crimes. Other types of crimes, like murder, are very rare here, and they are mainly revenge killings among tribes." Those score-settlings seldom get to court, he explained. Crimes such as robbery, he said, "always happen with foreigners, and when they're captured they immediately confess—not just about the new crime, but about all the rest. They do not ask for lawyers."

On the table in Rashid's office were homemade *maamoul*—date-filled pastries—and fresh dates from his native province. He wore a silver watch with diamonds that caught the light. "The judicial system is fixed because it depends on Sharia," he said. "For example, the idea that a killer should be killed in return, this will not change. What can change are the procedures that must be followed before you can kill someone."

When we left, I made a joke about how eager people in Saudi Arabia were to confess. The justice system often demanded the incontestable proof that only confessions can provide. A Western-style prosecutorial quid pro quo didn't seem to be operating here: people frequently confessed to crimes that guaranteed them the death penalty. Torture, I supposed, was the unmentioned motivator.

In February, after Saudi security forces arrested the eight purported members of Al Qaeda in connection

Until a doorknob's glint
Alerts him, and the opening door reveals
Obsidian gloom from which emerge
Eight shoe-tips in a row.

Shutting the door against
That bodiless surveillance, he begins
To waken, and his eyes to clear,
Conforming room to room

And shaking off the dream
For good, except that later on, in daylight,
Walking down street or corridor
Upon a clear-cut errand,

His mood will briefly yield
To an odd notion like an undertow,
A sense that he is mortally
Beset, and in need of ransom.

—*Richard Wilbur*

with the Riyadh shooting, all the suspects confessed to murder. "The voluntary surrender of culprits to police and their confessions reaffirm their desire to return to the right path and correct their mistakes," a member of the Interior Ministry told *Asharq Al Awsat*. Similarly, Saudi authorities charged seven British citizens with a series of bombings in Riyadh in 2000 and 2001 that were alleged to have been part of a mob war among bootleggers. Six of them confessed on Saudi television. The *Guardian* of London published a story arguing that all the men were tortured into making the statements, or else the confessions were fabricated; the bombings, the paper insinuated, were actually targeted assassinations by Islamists against Westerners who consumed alcohol. Soon afterward, more bombs went off—yet all the accused men remained in jail. After considerable pressure by the British government, the men were released. One of those arrested, Ron Jones, later said that he had been beaten on the soles of his feet. Another detainee said, "They threatened to plant drugs in my house to get my wife and child beheaded."

Many Saudis say that the level of state terror has declined. Recently, the Saudi government has allowed a human-rights delegation to monitor police and prisons. But there is a stark difference between the way the Saudi government treats its own citizens and the way it treats foreign workers. "There is a huge population that is not thought of as human at all," Khaled Abou El Fadl, the U.C.L.A. law professor, told me. "If you exclude Iraq, then Saudi Arabia would be one of the worst offenders in the Arab world. In Saudi Arabia, there is a well-established practice of 'disappearances,' people who have been missing for ten or fifteen years."

In Saudi Arabia, the death penalty is usually carried out in public. The senior public executioner is a man named Ahmad Rezkallah, who has been chopping off the heads of murderers, rapists, and drug smugglers in the public square for twenty-three years. He has killed more than three hundred people in that time, seventy of them women, who are dispatched with two shots to the head. "Most of the women I executed were strong and calm," he told *Al-Majalla*, an Arabic-language magazine published in London. "Women in general have nerves of steel." His technique with the men is to poke the condemned person in the back with the tip of his sword, which causes the head to jerk upward. Then off it comes.

The practice of public execution gives the Saudi legal system a medieval reputation in the West. Admittedly, over the past two decades there were five times as many executions in Saudi Arabia as there were in Texas. However, the Saudi method succeeds as deterrence—crime is very low. Moreover, in Texas, where I live, clemency is as rare as a snowstorm, and the governor holds himself aloof from the process of pardons and paroles. In Mecca province, the governor himself chairs a committee of reconciliation that asks the families of victims to spare the life of the convicted man or woman. Before killing the condemned person, the executioner once again publicly begs the family of the victim to show mercy. "I go and ask the family of the victim to give the criminal another chance," the executioner told *Al-Majalla*. "It has worked many times and the family has forgiven the criminal at the last minute. There is clapping and cheering. The scenes of happiness are indescribable." Sometimes wronged family members insist on carrying out the execution themselves, which is permitted in Saudi Arabia. They usually make a mess of it.

When American soldiers crossed into Iraq last March, many Saudis were furious. "The U.S. is dying to slaughter the Iraqi people!" Prince Amr Muhammad Al Faisal, an architect in Jeddah, said to me on the eve of the invasion. "They're thirsty for it! They can't wait!" But many who denounced the invasion in front of their friends privately confessed to me that at least a part of them welcomed it. "This entire region is in a fossilized state," Prince Amr conceded. "What is happening in Iraq is going to shake up the whole business. My guess is it will lead to greater nationalism. There will be more robust participation in decision-making, although not necessarily a democracy like in the West."

"We need a push," one reporter told me. "Maybe this is it."

The actual press coverage, however, was sharply critical of the Americans. On March 23rd, the front page of the *Gazette* showed an Iraqi child with his head blown off. The Arabic press and many of the satellite channels framed the bombing of Baghdad as "America's war on children." The lens of Al Jazeera focussed on Iraqis kneeling in front of the coalition troops with their hands behind their heads: it was a war designed to hu-

"Anyway, enough about me."

• •

miliate the Arabs once again. The Wahhabi clerics ranted against the infidels. "The Crusaders have come to take over!" one imam in Jeddah intoned in a sermon. The Saudi public was understandably inflamed. One Jeddah merchant waved a copy of *Al Watan* in my face and pointed at a photograph of an Iraqi boy being treated for hideous burns. "Do you think he will grow up and think that America is a great nation?" the man demanded.

The *Gazette* had chosen not to send its own correspondents, even though the war was next door. Its editorial slant was clear from the beginning. "WOUNDED U.S. SOLDIERS IN SHOCK AND AWE," read a headline a week after the war began. Like every other paper in the kingdom, the *Gazette* began to gloat when the Iraqi troops made a stab at resistance. There was a front-page story about the Imam of the Grand Mosque calling for an end to the "unjust" war. "Muslims across the Kingdom prayed for Baghdad's victory against the U.S.-British 'aggressors,'" the story said.

One steamy evening, I went to a *sheesha* bar with Dr. Khaled M. Batarfi, a columnist for *Al Madina* (and now its managing editor). As a child, Khaled had been Osama bin Laden's next-door neighbor. Khaled was constantly laboring for peace and was on a mission to help Saudis and Westerners understand each other. I had become quite fond of him. We began discussing what we thought would be the long-term effect of the war on Saudi Arabia. In Khaled's opinion, America's aggression showed that it was intending to remake the Middle East in its image. "But what you really want is to divide the kingdom into several states so you can take our oil, and we will have no power to resist you," he said.

Many Saudis believed that the invasion of Iraq was the opening act of a drama that would end with their main ally and protector consuming them. "The whole world is undoubtedly seeing the American cowboys as having come for only one aim: killing, destruction, and bloodshed," Khaled's newspaper proclaimed in an editorial that morning. One of the relentless themes of the Saudi media was that the twin objects of American power were oil and murder.

The next morning, at the *Gazette* office, Ramesh came into the local reporters' room with a mischievous look on his face. "Well, we're all pro-American now," he said.

"What do you mean?"

He told me that all the editors-in-chief in the kingdom had been ordered to drop their anti-American line.

At lunch that day, I asked Khaled Batarfi if *Al Madina* was really going to change its editorials. He gave me a resigned nod. "The editors were told, 'No more pictures of dead babies. Also, don't call it an invasion.'"

Indeed, by the next morning the entire Saudi press had moderated its position on the war. It was a strange experience for me, with all my preaching about the need for a free press. The newspapers suddenly appeared more sober and responsible, and I felt a sullied sense of relief.

In the days after the war, reports began to appear about young Saudis who had responded to the calls for jihad against the Anglo-American coalition. "VOLUNTEERS ACHIEVE MARTYRDOM" is how it was reported in the *Gazette*. One of my reporters, who had lost a friend in Iraq, invited me to meet some other young members of his tribe. They were Bedouins, and inside the middle-class apartment in south Jeddah where his brother lived there was a room that replicated a desert tent—the ceiling draped with fabric, and bolsters on the rug to lean against as we sipped tea. Inside the tent were four men in their twenties. The death of a friend was nothing new, they told me; they had already lost a number of young male relatives in Afghanistan, and another one in Iraq.

I asked them how they thought Saudi Arabia would be different ten years from now. The youngest of them, who had a wispy beard, said, "I think the Americans will invade Saudi Arabia, and a quarter of the population will be in American jails." Another told me that he prayed the Saudi government would evolve into a pure Islamic state, following the Taliban model.

The oldest Bedouin was a delicate man with long fine fingers and a pointed goatee that gave him a noble and slightly stylized appearance. His round wire-rimmed glasses caught whatever dim light there was inside the pavilion, making it hard to read his eyes. I was drawn to him, perhaps because of his intellectualism and his romantic, revolutionary air. The man who was killed was his cousin. I asked him what force had pulled his relative to Iraq. "It's when you have this power inside you—and in this closed country you can't get it out—that you go to such places," he told me.

His cousin couldn't find a job, he continued, and he didn't have the connections to get into the military. He himself had experienced the same problems. "Since the first Gulf crisis, I graduated with a good major, and the government promised me a lot of things," he went on. "I have the ambition to have a Ph.D. or a great job, and I suddenly found that the government put a new rule. They stopped any new government employment! The price of electricity and gas doubled, and the phone, and even rice and sugar. But they said be patient, we have to pay the price of the war. They promised it was just for a short period. It's been thirteen years now! I graduated seven years ago and still have no job." He said he often thought about becoming a martyr himself, like his cousin, who must have gone directly to Paradise. "Paradise is better than this miserable life!"

I asked him what he had studied in school.

"Library science."

With all their talk about martyrdom, there was another dark thought in their minds. "It might be government policy to send these guys to Iraq, instead of having them here, acting up," the oldest one said.

"Who are you talking about?" I asked. "Who is sending them?"

"Somebody who wants to make moral points around the world. They want to have these guys get killed instead of staying in the country and helping it out."

The others nodded. They saw a conspiracy between the clergy and the government—a plot to eliminate them, the unemployed Saudis. "It's been a holocaust for young people, what's happened in Iraq and Afghanistan," the librarian said.

These young men recognized the pointlessness of jihad, at least the way it was being promoted by the bloodthirsty clerics—who were, after all, government employees. There had to be a reason that the government would allow such dangerous talk, and in the minds of these young men the reason was that they were expendable. And a part of them said yes to that. They wanted out, and the only exit was Paradise.

I met my reporters for the final time in the *Gazette* conference room. I had a deep sense of disappointment about how little I had accomplished. Many of the stories my reporters had labored over never got published. There were a few good pieces, such as a profile Najla had written of the American consul-general in Jeddah, Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley, but Dr. Yusuf was angry that the piece had not been cleared with him.

I handed out a few mementos, including Texas Longhorn key chains for the women, for the day when they finally could drive.

There was a brief farewell party for me, with punch and pastries. Dr. Yusuf gave me a watch. The party was delayed a bit by my insistence that the women be allowed to attend. Najla handed me a card that everyone had signed. I said goodbye without once seeing her face.

Hasan Hatrash wasn't there. I found him in the cafeteria, his shoulders hunched, drinking a cup of tea and picking at a half-eaten piece of chocolate cake. He looked shattered. "I just got out of the hospital," he told me. "The doctor told me I shouldn't drive, but I wanted to come here and see you." He said he had low blood pressure, but that wasn't the real problem. "I told the doctor, when I sleep I can't wake up. I can't even put my thoughts together! He said that's depression." He seemed to me like many other young Saudis, whose lives are so unrealized and unexpressed. I wanted to give him some final word of advice, but I could think of nothing useful to say.

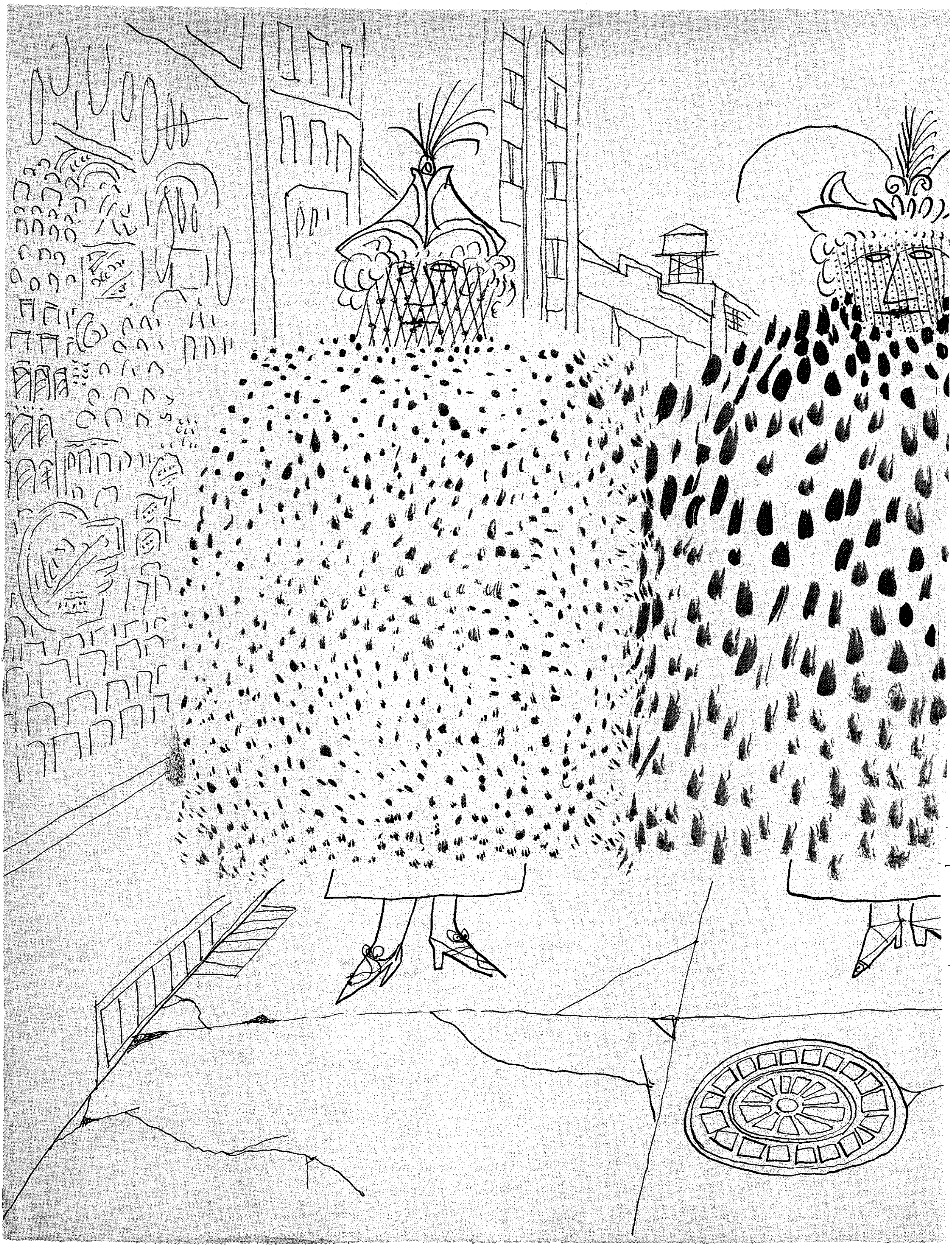
On May 12th, a few weeks after I left the kingdom, Al Qaeda bombed three Riyadh housing compounds, killing thirty-four. A subsequent bombing in November killed eighteen. Throughout the fall and into winter, there have been frequent raids and shoot-outs with suspected terrorists, and Saudi authorities claim to have prevented several other catastrophic attacks, including at least one directed at the royal family. Reformers have seized upon this volatile moment to campaign for certain progressive changes, such as an independent judiciary and popular elections. The government has begun a very difficult process of trying to bridle the radical voices in the mosques and cull certain hateful passages from the textbooks used in Saudi classrooms. The press was allowed to cover these events more freely than in the past; then again, the coverage served the government's interest in quelling Western critics of the regime.

When I read some of these more candid reports, my optimism about the Saudi press resurfaced. In March, Jamal Khashoggi was hired to be the editor-in-chief of *Al Watan*—a sign, perhaps, that the government was going to allow the press more freedom. And, indeed, Khashoggi published searching articles about the legacy of Wahhabism and cartoons ridiculing the religious police and the corrupt clergy who encouraged the suicide of Muslim youth. "Those who committed yesterday's crime are not only the suicide terrorists, but also everyone who instigated or justified the attacks, everyone who called them *mujahideen*, even everyone who kept silent," Khashoggi wrote after the May bombings. But days later Khashoggi was fired. Soon afterward, Hussein Shobokshi, the businessman who had been planning the class-action suit about Jeddah's sewage problem, wrote a column in *Okaz* in which he fantasized about a future Saudi Arabia. The story is powerful because it seems so ordinary, and so unreachable. He writes about returning from a business trip in Riyadh, where he has received a prize on behalf of the kingdom from an international human-rights conference. His daughter, a lawyer, picks him up at the airport and drives him to the office. On the way, they talk about voting in the municipal elections the next morning. He tells her to hurry, because he doesn't want to miss the broadcast of the finance minister proposing a national budget. After the article appeared in *Okaz*, the government ordered the paper to stop publishing Shobokshi's column.

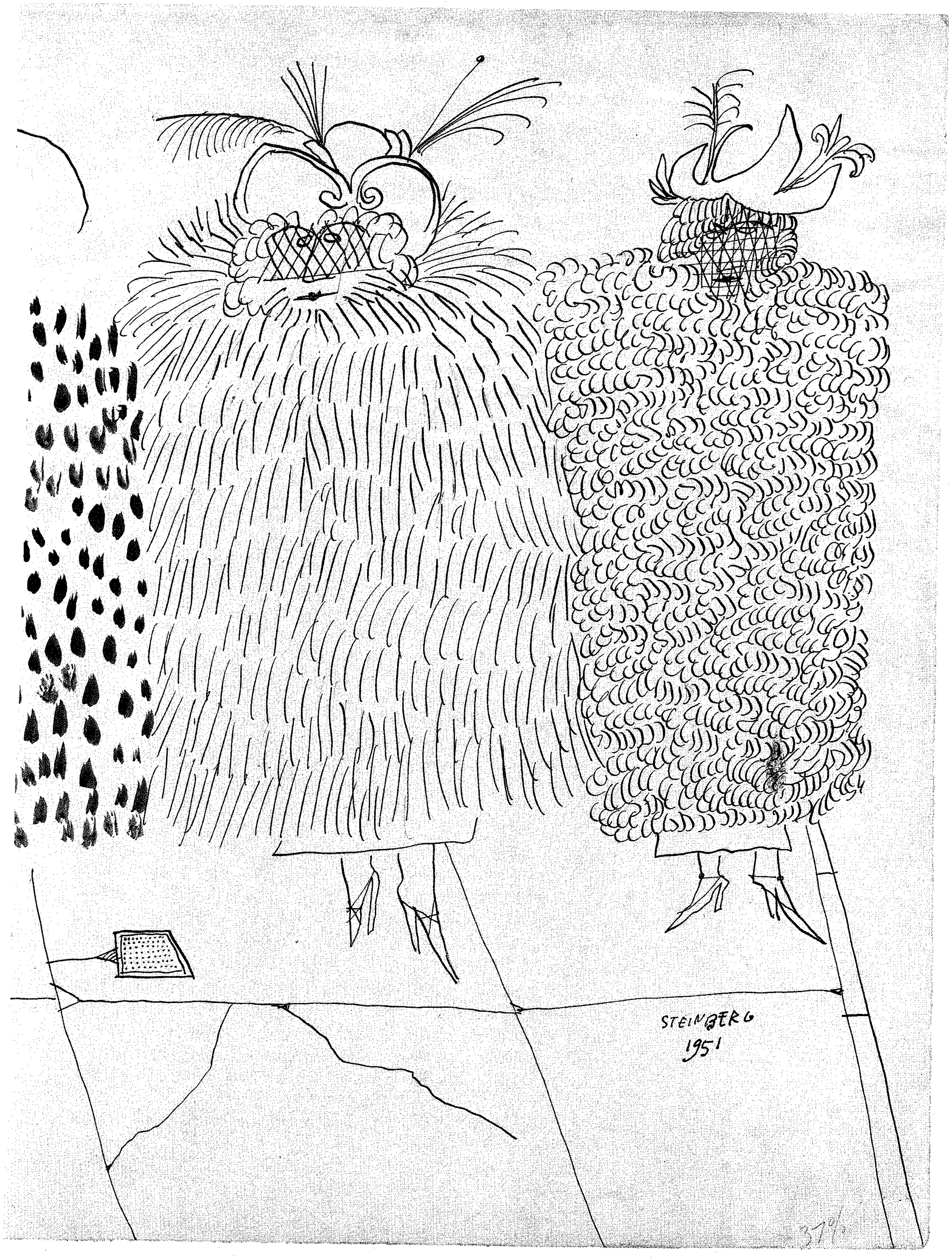
Soon after I returned home, Najla wrote me a note saying that she had been fired. She asked for my help in finding a job. Then I heard from Mamdouh al-Harthy, who said that he had quit the *Gazette* and wanted to go to journalism school in the West. And Hasan Hatrash wrote to say that he'd gone to Malaysia for a vacation. One day in Kuala Lumpur, he was invited to play with a band. "I had the time of my life, and the number of chicks who wanted to talk to me was more than I could handle," he reported. "The good news is, they invited me to play with them in their second gig at a bigger club on Sunday. Wow! Finally, I'm living!"

He decided not to go home. ♦

SKETCHBOOK BY SAUL STEINBERG



SAUL STEINBERG, "FUR COATS" (1951) ©THE SAUL STEINBERG FOUNDATION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FICTION

BROCCOLI

BY LARA VAPNYAR

"Here's another one, seduced and abandoned," Nina's husband often said, pulling a bunch of wilted, yellowed broccoli from the refrigerator shelf. He held it, pinched between two fingers, his handsome face contorted in disgust, as though it smelled.

Nina, blushing, took the broccoli away from him and threw it in the garbage. She told him she was sorry; she had been busy all week and never had time to cook. Nina worked in Manhattan. By the time she got home to Brooklyn, it was already seven-thirty, sometimes eight, and the most she could do was make her husband and herself sandwiches, or boil some meat dumplings from a Russian supermarket.

"I know," her husband said. "But why buy all these vegetables if you know you won't have time to cook them?"

Nina shrugged. She liked shopping for vegetables.

She couldn't say exactly when she'd first felt the urge—possibly two years earlier, on her second day in America, when she and her husband had left her sister's Brooklyn apartment for the first time to explore the nearest shopping street. Nina's sister, who'd lived in America for fourteen years and called herself an American, assumed that Nina would be impatient to see it. "Go, go," she said. "But don't buy *anything*. There are two rules you have to remember in order to survive in America. First: Never buy anything in expensive stores unless they're having a fifty-per-cent-off sale. Second: Never buy anything in cheap stores."

On the unimaginatively named Avenue M, Nina and her husband browsed through stores that all looked alike to them, no matter what was being sold: food, electronics, clothes, or hardware. They seemed to be walking in and out of the same store over and over, simply to hear the doorbell chime.

It was a pale, cold February morning, and Nina was hiding her reddened nose in the fur collar of her Russian coat. She clutched her husband's elbow, stepping carefully over piles of garbage, reluctant to look up at the ashen sky or sideways at the motley signs of the shops. She was feeling dizzy and a little nauseated from the flight and the all-night talk with her sister that had followed. Only one store attracted her attention—a small Chinese grocery, with fruit and vegetables set outside on plywood stands. Colorful piles of oranges, tomatoes, cucumbers—everything was sparklingly clean and bright. Nina read the side of the box of tomatoes: "Sunripe." She was still learning English, and every new expression seemed to her exciting and rich with meaning. "Sunripe" brought to mind a vegetable patch on a summer afternoon, the smell of dark soil heated by the sun, pale-green stems bent and bursting under the weight of juicy tomatoes. She wanted to touch the tomatoes in the box to see if their skin was still warm from the sun that shone on them as they ripened. She was just reaching out her hand when her husband pulled her away to another store.

Now Nina shopped for vegetables alone every Saturday morning—her husband loved to sleep late on weekends. She drove to Eighty-sixth Street and shopped in the Chinese and Russian stores between Bay Parkway and Twenty-third Avenue. The stores all offered pretty much the same selection of produce, but Nina liked to explore them all, in search of something surprising: the occasional white asparagus, plastic baskets of gooseberries, tiny, nutlike new potatoes. On the days when there was nothing new, it was still interesting to compare the stores. In one, the onions might be large and firm but the heads of lettuce wilted and colorless. Another might have the freshest greens and onions that were soft and gray, hiding timidly in string bags.

Nina felt a thrill as soon she got out of the car and placed her feet on the sidewalk, littered with torn lettuce leaves, onion peels, and overripe tomatoes. In the stores, she walked up and down the aisles, running her fingers over tomatoes as smooth and glossy as polished furniture. She cupped avocados, feeling their lumpy peel with her palms. Sometimes she dug a fingernail into the rind of an orange until it spat out a little of its pungent juice. She avoided touching the hairy, egg-shaped kiwis and the wormlike string beans, but she liked to stroke the feathery bunches of dill and parsley and squeeze the artichokes, which felt like soft pine cones. She patted cantaloupes and she tapped watermelons with her index finger, listening to the hollow sound they made. But, most of all, Nina loved broccoli. It smelled of young spring grass, and it looked like a tree, with its hard solid stem and its luxuriant crown of tight, grainy florets.

Nina bought a bunch of broccoli every week, along with various other vegetables. She carried big brown bags to her car, firmly believing that this weekend she would find time to cook. There was still Saturday afternoon ahead, and then all of Sunday. She would wash the vegetables as soon as she got home and then cook something with them—spinach gnocchi, maybe, or grilled zucchini parcels, or three-cheese broccoli gratin.

But as soon as she got home Nina found herself in a whirl of things to do. She had to shower, curl her hair, brush it out if it started to go frizzy, try on and reject several sweaters and pairs of pants, put on makeup, find her husband's missing sock, iron his shirt, check that the gas was off, and lock the door. It seemed only minutes before she found herself in the car again, on the way to a party, glancing back and forth between her husband in the driver's seat and her own

PAINTING BY WAYNE THIEBAUD

reflection in the mirror on the sun visor. Her husband was deep in his thoughts, which was natural, Nina told herself, since he was driving. And her reflection was unsatisfying—despite her efforts, her hair was still frizzy, her soft-featured, round face was poorly made up, and her blue angora sweater was too tight around the armpits. Clothes bought at fifty-per-cent-off sales were always either the wrong size or the wrong style.

In the car, Nina rarely thought about her vegetables. They lay abandoned on the cramped refrigerator shelves: tomatoes buried under zucchinis, lettuce leaves caught in the edge of the vegetable drawer, a bunch of broccoli that wouldn't fit in the drawer sitting by itself on the third shelf.

The parties were thrown by Pavlik, a friend of Nina's husband from work, whose wife had divorced him a few years earlier. Pavlik was a heavy man with an uneven ginger-colored beard. He wore ill-fitting trousers and shirts that never seemed clean. He loved to laugh heartily and smack his friends on the back. "Don't mind the mess!" he yelled as his guests wandered through the dusty labyrinth of his house, stumbling over secondhand furniture, broken electronic equipment, and heavy volumes of Russian literature. It seemed to Nina that Pavlik's functions as a host were limited to calling out that phrase. He didn't feed or entertain his guests. People arrived with their own food and wine, their own plastic dinnerware, their own guitars, and sometimes their own poems, written on scraps of notebook paper.

None of Pavlik's guests were professional poets or musicians. Most of them worked as computer programmers, an occupation that they had taken up in America, where they found it easier and more profitable than trying to prove the value of their Russian degrees in science or the arts. Some of them, Nina's husband included, adopted a condescending attitude toward their new profession: it was boring; it was beneath them. "Computer programming, like everyone else," they answered reluctantly when asked their occupation, "but that's not what I did in my previous life." They preferred to talk about art or music or such exciting hobbies as alpinism, rafting, and photographing Alaskan sunsets.

Nina was a computer programmer, too, but she had always been a computer programmer. She didn't know much about poetry or music, and she didn't have any exciting talents or hobbies.

"My wife is a vegetable lover," Nina's husband would say, introducing her to Pavlik's circle.

Nina didn't like Pavlik's guests. The men were untidy and unattractive. They loaded their paper plates with cold cuts and smoked too much. They said the same things over and over, and it seemed to Nina that there was always a piece of ham or salami hanging out of their mouths when they talked.

The women, with one or two exceptions, were attractive, but in an unpleasant way. They were thin and sophisticated; they had straight hair; they had strong hands with long, powerful fingers, toughened by playing piano or guitar; they had soulful eyes, saddened by all the poetry they'd read; they had mysterious expressions of eternal fatigue. They had everything that Nina lacked.

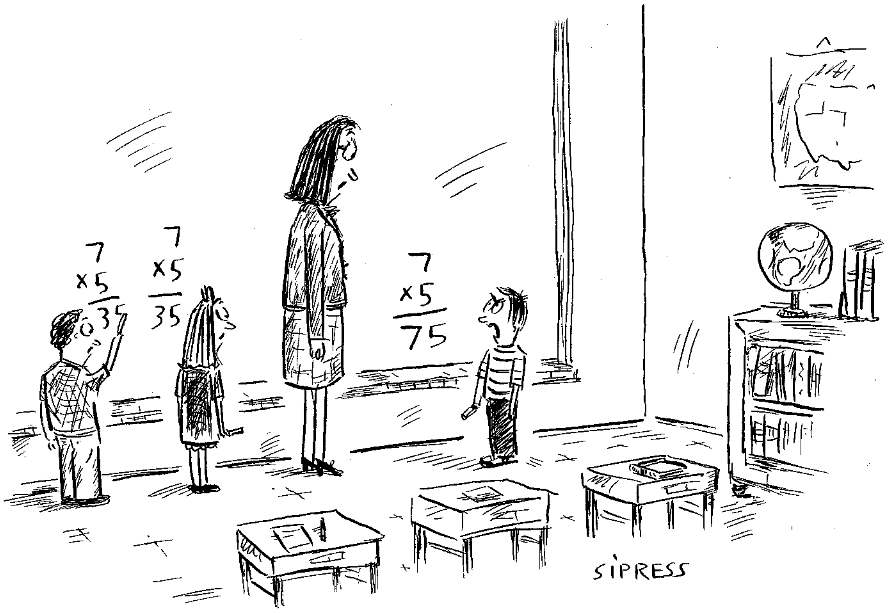
Nina usually spent the evening in one corner of Pavlik's stiff sofa, away from her husband and the other guests, who sat on the floor by the cold fireplace. The sound of their laughter, their singing, and their reading floated around the room, but didn't seem to reach Nina. The food and wine, arranged on a rickety folding table by the window, were more accessible. She made frequent trips to that table, where the cold cuts were spread out on paper plates, loaves of bread sat on cutting boards, and pickles swam in glass jars. There were usually a few unopened bottles of vodka and a five-litre box of Burgundy or Chablis. The wine dripped from a little plastic faucet onto the beige carpet, forming intricate patterns, so that by the end of the party Pavlik's modest floor covering looked like a fancy Turkish rug.

When Nina and her husband first started coming to Pavlik's parties, she had joined the others by the fireplace. She'd loved to sit across from her husband and watch his face as he played the guitar. His head tilted forward, and the bangs of his dark hair fell to his half-closed eyes. From time to time, he glanced at her, and his eyes flickered through the forest of his hair like two fireflies. At those moments, Nina felt that he was playing for her alone, and the music touched her, making her skin prickle and her throat hurt.

With time, though, Nina noticed that she wasn't the only person watching her husband as he played. Other women watched, too, and in exactly the same way. Nina saw how their faces lit up under his fleeting gaze, just as hers did. Those women probably felt that he was playing for them, too, and sometimes Nina thought that they had more right to be played for by her husband than she did. When they looked over at Nina, she felt as if she were expanding, bloating, metamorphosing into an oversized exhibit of a dull, talentless woman with the wrong clothes and the wrong makeup. She knew that they were all asking themselves why this interesting, talented man had married her. Her sister didn't ask. "You were his ticket to America," she reminded Nina frequently. "Can you disprove that?"

Nina couldn't. It was true that her husband had always wanted to emigrate but, without close relatives in the United States, hadn't been able to obtain a visa. It was true that, having married Nina, he had got his visa. It was true that Nina hadn't wanted to emigrate but had yielded to her husband's wishes. It wasn't true, though, that he had married Nina for those reasons alone, and it wasn't true that he didn't love her. Nina's sister didn't know what Nina knew. She didn't know that when Nina had been in the hospital with appendicitis her husband hadn't left her room for even a minute. She had begged him to go and get some coffee or a breath of fresh air, but he had stayed with her. He'd held Nina's hand and squeezed it involuntarily every time she moaned. Nina's sister also didn't know how he'd sometimes hug Nina from behind and bury his face in her hair and whisper, "There is nothing like this. Nothing in the world." She could feel his sharp nose and his hot breath on the nape of her neck, and her eyes filled with tears. Nina's sister didn't know that he often said the same words when they were making love.

It was a relief to come home after the parties and find herself in bed with a book, next to her husband. Nina's nightstand was piled with cookbooks, bought at a fifty-per-cent discount at Barnes & Noble. She read lying on her back, resting the book on her stomach. The thick, glossy pages rustled against her satin nightgowns, bought at a fifty-per-cent-off sale at Victoria's Secret. She loved that sound as much as she loved the prickly sensation on the soles of her feet when they brushed up against her husband's hairy legs. And she loved the euphoric feeling she got when she looked at lustrous photographs of okra-and-tomato stew in rustic clay bowls, baskets of fresh vegetables shot against a background of meadows or olive groves. In her favorite book, "Italian Cuisine: The Taste of the Sun," there were also images of the cooking process. In those photographs, smooth, light-skinned female hands with evenly trimmed fingernails performed magical actions on vegetables. The hands looked like Nina's hands, and Nina fantasized that they were her hands. That it was she who had made those perfectly curled carrot strips. It was she who had pushed the stubborn stuffing inside the bell peppers. It was she who had rinsed the grit off the greens and chopped the broccoli, scattering tiny green seeds all over the table. Nina's lips moved to form the almost passionate words of the cooking instructions. "Brush with olive oil," "Bring to a boil and simmer gently," "Scoop out the pulp," "Peel," "Chop," "Slice," "Crush." When she put the book away and stretched out against her husband's back, her lips continued moving for some time.



"It may be wrong, but it's how I feel."

Nina's husband left her at the end of the summer, just as the tomatoes and the peaches were performing their yearly invasion of the fruit-and-vegetable stores on Eighty-sixth Street. Nina's refrigerator was full of them when her sister opened it.

"The fifth week is the worst," Nina's sister was saying. "The first four weeks it hasn't sunk in yet—you feel the shock, but you don't feel the pain. It's like you're numb. But the fifth week . . . Brace yourself for the fifth week." She crouched by the refrigerator, unloading the food she had brought over. She had come to console Nina with four large bags from a Russian supermarket. Nina felt tired. She sat at the table, staring at her sister's broad back. She was thinking that if you banged on it with a hammer it would produce a loud, reverberating sound, as if it were made of hard wood. The refrigerator shelves filled quickly: cartons of currant juice ("Currant juice saved my life—I basically lived on it when Volodya left me"), cream cheese, farmer's cheese, soft cheese, Swiss cheese, bread, pickles, a jar of cherry compote.

"Nina!" her sister shrieked. "What is that?" She had pulled out the vegetable drawer. Inside, there was a pile of old tomatoes, with white beards of mold growing in the places where their skins had split; there were peaches covered with brown spots; there were dark and slimy bunches of collard greens. "You've got a whole vegetable graveyard in here," Nina's sister grumbled, emptying the drawer into the garbage. The vegetables made squelching sounds as they landed.

A faint rotten smell stayed in the kitchen for a long time after Nina's sister had left. It wasn't unpleasant. It was the simple, cozy smell of a kitchen, the smell of vegetable soup simmering on the stove, the kind that her mother used to make.

Contrary to her sister's prediction, the fifth week didn't bring Nina any extreme pain. It only added to the fatigue. She felt as if she were recovering from a long, exhausting illness. She tried to do as few household chores as possible. She didn't shop for vegetables anymore. She still read her cookbooks after work, but she was too tired to do much more than scan the index. She ran her finger over the smooth pages and neat columns of tiny letters. The austere phrases were logical and easy to read. "Broccoli: gratin—17; macaroni with—72; penne and—78." She had no desire to look up the recipes. She just went on to the next entry. "Eggplant: braised chicken with onions and—137; and tomato, baked—162." "Zucchini: and mushrooms, sautéed—34; shredded, jasmine rice with—201; soup—41; stuffed—57."

Pavlik's booming voice on the answering machine broke into the elegant sequence of artichoke recipes. Nina had turned off the ringer on her phone weeks before, and now she listened to the messages as they came through her old scratchy answering machine. Most of them were from her sister, calling to ask if she was eating well and to tell her the latest news: that Nina's husband had been spotted on Brighton Beach with some "dried herring," that he was moving to Boston, that he had already moved. Nina's sister's voice seemed to her distant and somewhat unnatural. Pavlik's voice made her jump. "Hey! Nina! Are you home?" he shouted. On impulse, Nina looked at the front door. It was hard to believe that the roaring was coming from the modest plastic box on the wall. Then Pavlik's voice dropped too low, and it was hard to make out his words. "Don't disappear," he said, if Nina heard him correctly.

Pavlik's place looked different. Nina realized it as soon as she stepped into the living room, but she couldn't quite figure out how it was different. The rickety table still stood on the stained rug, the fireplace was stacked with old magazines, Pavlik's big frame was shaking with laughter, the vacant sofa was waiting for Nina. Everything was there, everything was in place, and yet something had undeniably changed. "The size—it's become bigger," Nina decided, taking her seat in the corner of the sofa. Pavlik's house had more space and more air than it had had before.

A thin, delicate woman with a guitar was singing something about a little path in the woods that meandered through the trees. Nina liked the song. When it ended, the singer put the guitar down and walked to the food table. She was wearing a long blue cardigan with drooping pockets. There was nothing mysterious about her. A man with receding hair and a closely trimmed gray beard took over the guitar. Nina's eyes travelled from the man's moving, outstretched elbow, protruding through his shabby corduroy sleeve, to his hunched shoulders and the greasy line of his hair. She suddenly understood that his untidiness wasn't a kind of snobbish fashion statement but a sign of loneliness, of neglect. She saw that the women sitting in a circle were watching the man, just as they had watched her husband. They were tired, lonely women, just like her. There was nothing mysterious about them, either. Nina also noticed that she wasn't the only one sitting outside the circle. In fact, there were only a few people in it. Others were scattered all around Pavlik's house. She could see lonely figures here and there, sitting quietly on a chair, an old box, a windowsill, or wandering through the house. From time to time, the paths of the lonely figures intersected and then conversations were struck up. Awkward yet hopeful conversations, just like the one that Nina was having now.

"You're a vegetable lover, aren't you?" asked a man who had seated himself in the opposite corner of Nina's sofa. Nina nodded. "I thought I heard that from somebody. Do you like to cook vegetables?" Nina nodded again. "You know, I love vegetables, myself. My wife hates it when I cook, though." The man rolled his eyes, making Nina smile. He was short, with thin rusty-red hair and a very pale complexion. He had a tiny piece of toilet paper with a spot of dried blood stuck to his cheek.

"Are you a computer programmer like everyone else?" Nina asked. The man nodded with a smile. "And in your previous life?"

"A high-school physics teacher. But I can't say that I miss it. I used to be terrified of my students."

Nina laughed. He was easy to talk to. She looked at his smiling eyes, then down at his hands—white fingers, short fingernails, red hair on the knuckles. She tried to imagine what it would be like if one of these hands were to accidentally brush against her breast.

Nina wiped the little beads of sweat off her nose. He was a strange, married, not particularly attractive man.

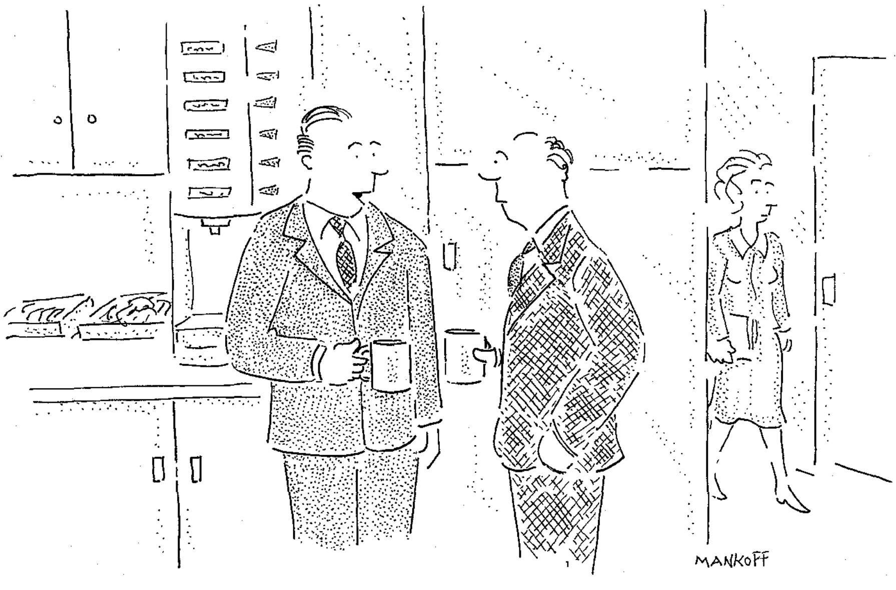
"So what's your favorite vegetable?" she asked.

"Probably fennel. Fennel has an incredible flavor, reminds me of a wild apple and, oddly enough, freshly sawed wood. Do you like fennel?"

Nina nodded. She liked fennel: it had a funny, slightly ribbed surface, it was heavy, it had weird green shoots that seemed to grow out of nowhere. Nina had never tasted fennel. "I like broccoli," she said.

"Oh, broccoli! I love how they cook it in Chinese places. How do you cook it?" The man with the piece of tissue stuck to his cheek looked safe enough to confide in.

"I've never cooked broccoli, or any other vegetable," Nina said.



"Nope, no New Year's resolutions for me this year—I'm still working on a backlog dating from '87."

Nina spent the better part of the following Saturday shopping for cooking utensils. "Let's have a cooking date," the man from the party had suggested. A cooking date. Nina was sure that, at some point in the past, she had been as excited as she was now, but she couldn't remember when. She went to Macy's and, breaking the fifty-per-cent-discount rule for the first time, bought two drastically overpriced skillets, a set of shiny stainless-steel saucepans, a steamer, and a pretty wooden spoon with a carved handle. "Do you want wedding gift wrap?" the cashier asked.

Halfway home, Nina realized that she hadn't bought nearly enough. Knives! She needed knives, and a cutting board, and a colander, and God knew what else. She swerved her car in the direction of Avenue M, where, breaking the rule about never buying anything in the cheap stores, she bought a set of knives, two cutting boards—one wooden and one plastic—a colander, a curved grapefruit knife, because it looked so cute, a vegetable peeler, a set of stainless-steel bowls, and two aprons with pictures of wild mushrooms on yellow backgrounds. In a grocery store next door, Nina bought olive oil, black pepper, chili pepper, and a jar of dry dark-green stuff with Chinese characters on the label.

By two-thirty—half an hour before the man was due to arrive—Nina had everything ready. The sparkling saucepans and the skillet stood proudly on the stove, and the bowls, the colander, the cutting boards, and the knives were arranged on the kitchen counter in careful disarray around the centerpiece: "Italian Cuisine: The Taste of the Sun." Nina observed her kitchen, trying to shake off her embarrassing excess of excitement.

The man came on time, early even. At five to three, he stood in Nina's hallway, removing his bulky leather jacket and cap, sprinkled with raindrops. He smelled of wet leather. He handed Nina a bottle of wine and a baguette in a sodden paper bag.

"In the movies, when a man hands a woman a baguette and a bottle of wine, it always seems chic, doesn't it?" he asked.

Nina nodded. He was more homely than she remembered. Her memory had somehow managed to erase the red spots on his pasty cheeks, to color his brows and eyelashes, to make him slimmer and add an inch or two to his height. It was strange to see him in her house, especially in her tiny hallway, where every object was familiar, its position carefully chosen. He clashed with the surroundings like a mismatched piece of furniture. Nina quickly led him into the kitchen.

"So, are we cooking broccoli today?" the man asked, leafing through "Italian Cuisine: The Taste of the Sun," his freshly washed hands still smelling of Nina's soap.

"Broccoli, yes," Nina mumbled, suddenly struck by a dreadful suspicion, which she confirmed on opening the refrigerator. She had forgotten to buy the vegetables.

She jerked out the vegetable drawer, hoping for a miracle. It was empty and clean, wiped down with a kitchen towel dipped in Clorox by Nina's sister's firm hand. There was only a tiny strip of onion skin stuck between the edge of the drawer and the shelf above. Nina turned to the man, motioning to the empty drawer; she found it hard to speak, as if someone were squeezing her throat. Everything seemed hopeless and ridiculous. The counter crammed with its gleaming kitchenware. The barren vegetable drawer. This perfect stranger, who had come to cook in her kitchen. Nina herself, her energy drained away, standing now with her forehead pressed to the cold rubber lining of the refrigerator door.

"Do you want me to go to the supermarket?" the man asked. Nina shook her head. Now that everything had been exposed to her in all its absurdity, she knew that it would never work.

A bunch of broccoli was stuck between the third shelf and the back of the refrigerator. It hung upside down, the florets nearly touching the shelf below. The man saw it first and pointed it out to Nina. The broccoli wasn't yellow or covered with slime. During the weeks that it had hung between the shelves, it had become darker and dryer. In a few more weeks it would have become a broccoli mummy. It smelled all right—or, rather, it didn't smell of anything.

"I'm sure we can still cook it," the man said.

Nina ran cold water over the florets, then shook the bunch fiercely, letting out a shower of green drops. She chopped off the stem, then cut off the base of each floret, watching with fascination as each piece split into tiny new bunches of broccoli. She peeled the stem and cut it into even, star-shaped slices. Some things turned out to be different from her cooking fantasies, others exactly the same. Some were disappointing, others better than she had ever imagined. Then, when the broccoli was in the pot on the stove, boiling water sputtering under the saucepan's shiny lid, the man suggested that Nina move one of her kitchen chairs closer to the stove and stand on it. "Climb up and inhale," the man said. "The hot air travels up. The strongest aroma should be right under the ceiling."

Nina stood on the chair, her hair almost touching the ceiling, her eyes closed, her face pointed upward, her nostrils dilated. The warm smell of broccoli rose, caressing her face, enveloping her whole. ♦

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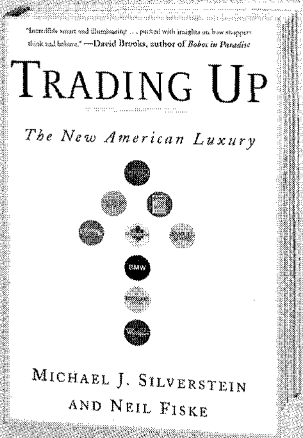
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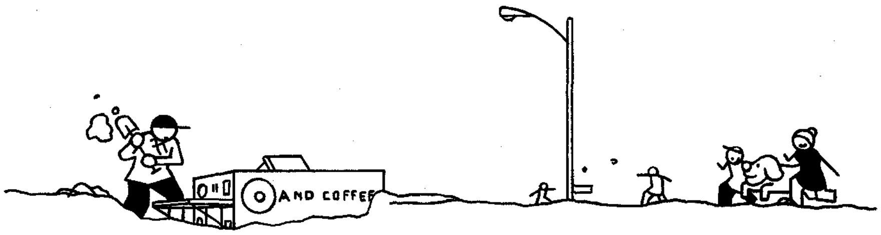


BOOKS

MASTERS OF THE MATRIX

Kennedy, Nixon, and the culture of the image.

BY LOUIS MENANDE

“It was TV more than anything else that turned the tide,” John F. Kennedy said on November 12, 1960, four days after his election to the Presidency. He was referring to the four televised debates between him and Richard Nixon, broadcast earlier that fall. Television debates are now nearly an official rite of passage in a politician’s progress to the Presidency. Holding a Presidential election today without a television debate would seem almost undemocratic, as though voters were being cheated by the omission of some relevant test, some necessary submission to mass scrutiny.

That’s not what many people thought at the time of the first debates. Theodore H. White, who subscribed fully to Kennedy’s view that the debates had made the difference in the election, complained, in “The Making of the President 1960,” that television had dumbed down the issues by forcing the candidates to respond to questions instantaneously. “Neither man could pause to indulge in the slow reflection and rumination, the slow questioning of alternatives before decision, that is the inner quality of leadership,” White said. He also believed that Kennedy’s “victory” in the debates was largely a triumph of image over content. People who listened to the debates on the radio, White pointed out, scored it a draw; people who watched it thought that, except in the third debate, Kennedy had crushed Nixon. (This little statistic has been repeated many times as proof of the distorting effects of television. Why not the distorting effects of radio? It also may be that people whose medium of choice or opportunity in 1960 was radio tended to fit a Nixon rather than a Kennedy demographic.) White thought that Kennedy benefitted because his image on television was “crisp”; Nixon’s—light-colored suit, wrong makeup, bad posture—was “fuzzed.” “In 1960 television had won the nation away from sound to images,” he concluded, “and that was that.”

Daniel Boorstin, the University of Chicago historian, who was later the Librarian of Congress, agreed, except that he didn’t date the triumph of the image from 1960; he dated it from the start of what he called “the Graphic Revolution,” back in the nineteenth century. Boorstin’s “The Image,” published in 1961, the same year as White’s book on the Kennedy-Nixon race, is the work in which Boorstin introduced his (well-known) definition of a celebrity as a person well known for being well known. His argument was that the rise of mechanical means of communication and reproduction—the telegraph, photography, the high-speed printing press, radio, television—and the subsequent emergence of media “sciences,” such as advertising and public relations, had produced a culture of what he called

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RICHARD AVEDON

The Kennedys were beautiful, and they photographed beautifully. They did not need to do much to stage-manage the occasion.

"pseudo-events," events that are neither real nor illusory, neither genuine nor fake, like, he said, the Kennedy-Nixon debates. The debates were manufactured spectacles designed to generate material for further manufactured spectacles, such as postmortem commentary supplied by the employees of the news organizations that had produced the things in the first place. But the consequences of all this contrivance were real enough. "Pseudo-events . . . lead to emphasis on pseudo-qualifications," Boorstin maintained. "If we test Presidential candidates by their talents on TV quiz performances, we will, of course, choose presidents for precisely these qualities. In a democracy, reality tends to conform to the pseudo-event. Nature imitates art."

The maverick economist Kenneth Boulding had published a book called "The Image" in 1956, but Boulding was mostly interested in the fact that people's behavior is often based on pictures they hold of the world that may have little empirical basis but that serve as "reality." Boulding thought that this raised intriguing epistemological issues. Though Boorstin found the epistemology of the image intriguing, too, his book was a jeremiad. Visual images were central to the culture that Boorstin was attacking, but by the term "image" he meant something all-encompassing, something like a substitute reality. Today, his book, prose style aside, reads, rather remarkably, like the work of a postmodern theorist. A lot of what French writers such as Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard later wrote about the "society of the spectacle" and the "simulacrum" Boorstin had already said.

Boorstin thought that the image had taken over not because of anything to do with the nature of capitalism (a word that, amazingly, does not appear in his book) but because Americans couldn't face ordinary life, in which the excellent and the extraordinary are rare, and most things are difficult, imperfect, disappointing, or boring. Americans needed their experience to be constantly sweetened, like chewing gum, and a whole industry had grown up to provide this artificially enhanced reality. Boorstin thought that this pseudo-world had become, Matrix-like, so nearly complete that it controlled even its controllers.

"Our national politics has become a competition for images or between images, rather than between ideals," Boorstin concluded. "An effective president must be every year more concerned with projecting images of himself." In 1961, this observation seemed alarming or alarmist. Today, no wisdom is more conventional. Reflection on the manufactured quality of the event is a required element in the analysis of manufactured events. Journalists whose business is made possible by the contrivance of political spectacles masquerading as news—the photo op, the press conference, the television debate—feel obliged to point out, ruefully (or conveying an image of ruefulness), how much campaign energy is put into contriving political spectacles. The value of an image in politics is like the value of a stock in the market: it already reflects a discount against the future charge of dissimulation. This is the epistemological challenge that Boorstin and Boulding were talking about. A manufactured event is somehow true and not true. John Kerry on the motorcycle, George Bush on the flight deck: the knowledge that these perfectly real things are also "images" whose "reality" should be regarded with skepticism is part of their content. Everyone knows that "it's just an image." But what, exactly, does that mean?

Among the subjects of most enduring fascination for students of political image-making are the principals in the campaign that, for many people, started it all, Kennedy and Nixon themselves. Forty years after Dallas and thirty years after the Watergate hearings, opinion about the "real" Kennedy and the "real" Nixon is as unsettled as it ever was. You can still start an argument about it. Two new, serious books are devoted to the topic. David Lubin's "Shooting Kennedy: JFK and the Culture of Images" (California; $24.95) is an art historian's look at some of the famous photographs of John and Jackie Kennedy. David Greenberg's "Nixon's Shadow: The History of an Image" (Norton; $26.95) is a political historian's study of Nixon as he appeared to, and was represented by, different audiences—liberals, the New Left, the press, Nixon loyalists, and so on. Lubin's book is mostly about images in the visual sense—photographs, movies, and paintings. Greenberg means "image" in the broader sense, as the name for any self-conscious or manufactured presentation. But their attitude toward the "culture of the image" is the same. They think that people don't read images so much as they read *into* images—that what they make of an image is conditioned by who they are and by what they already know. Those radio listeners who thought that Nixon won the debates heard what they were trained to hear and, as we all do, what they wanted to hear.

"Shooting Kennedy" lives up to its title. Readers who find that title a distasteful pun will probably feel that many of Lubin's interpretations—of Abraham Zapruder's film of the assassination as a New Wave movie, for example—are inappropriate, and inappropriate in a way that, for reasons not easy to articulate, feels somehow blasphemous. But this feeling is precisely what Lubin is trying to understand. It is his point of departure: the grip that photographic images of the Kennedys exert on the American imagination must be due to something more than the individual pictures themselves. They enlist feelings of defensiveness or piety, he thinks, because they resonate with a whole "culture of images" surrounding them. The Zapruder film is, in the end, a movie. You cannot detach your experience of watching it from your prior experience of watching movies. So that if it "reads" as a kind of horror movie, in which disaster strikes from above, without warning or reason, this might be because you have also seen Alfred Hitchcock's "The Birds." Lubin's chase after contexts for the Zapruder film turns up, besides "The Birds," Hitchcock's "North by Northwest," Michelangelo Antonioni's "Blow-Up," Alain Resnais's "Last Year at Marienbad," Arthur Penn's "Bonnie and Clyde," and (somehow) Andy Warhol's "Blow-Job." He rates Zapruder's twenty-six-second movie "a crucial cinematic text of the twentieth century."

In this anthropological spirit—the spirit that treats every artifact as linked to every other artifact in the web of culture—Lubin puts pictures of the Kennedys next to Renaissance Madonnas, magazine advertisements, and television sitcoms. He has, admirably, no shame. For example, he notices that the poignant photograph of John John saluting his father's casket was printed in *Life* across from a full-page ad for I. W. Harper's Kentucky Bourbon featuring the image of a top-hatted Southern gentleman, in silhouette, offering a friendly salute. It's the kind of thing only an art historian (or a Martian) would notice, but, once you see it, you start to wonder how it happened, and why no one at *Life* picked up the visual echo. The answer may be that people file their images in separate compartments—news in one place, ads in another—and don't think to compare them. "Shooting Kennedy" is an aggressive act of decompartmentalization.

Greenberg's approach to the political image is similar. Boorstin, Greenberg says, was right to identify image-making as having been central to American politics ever since the Administration of Franklin Roosevelt; he was wrong to associate it with inauthenticity. "Fears of image-making and jeremiads against inauthenticity rest on the faulty assumption that images are distinct from reality," Greenberg says. "These aren't shadows cast upon a cavern wall but the stuff of political experience itself." Nixon, he thinks, is the key figure in understanding this development. "No postwar politician did more to educate Americans to the primacy of images in politics," he says.

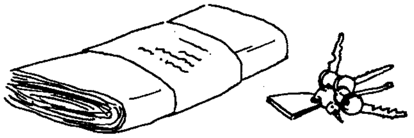
As both books remind us, the striking fact is that Nixon was much more sophisticated about image manipulation than Kennedy was. Of course, the Kennedys used the media for political purposes. They were neither innocents nor purists—unlike, for example, Adlai Stevenson, who, in his acceptance speech at the 1956 Democratic National Convention, called political advertising "the ultimate indignity to the democratic process" (a phrase quoted by Greenberg). But, as Lubin's analyses make clear, the artistry in most of the famous photographs of the Kennedys was due not to the Kennedys but, largely, to the photographers. People loved to take pictures of the Kennedys; the Kennedys were beautiful, and they photographed beautifully. They didn't need to do much to stage-manage their photo ops. Nixon was neither beautiful nor photogenic. For him, image manipulation was not a supplement to political life; it was close to a basic necessity.

From the start of his career, Nixon was surrounded by people whose experience was in advertising. One might assume that he sought those people out, but he seems, in fact, to have attracted them. His earliest backer, Roy Day, who founded the Committee of 100, in 1945, which recruited Nixon to run for Congress against Jerry Voorhis, sold advertising for a Southern California newspaper. H. R. Halde-

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Babes in the Wood, *by Ruth Rendell (Crown; $25).* In the matriarchy of British crime fiction, Rendell is the weird sister; her novels concern themselves with the more darkly enigmatic corners of motivation. Her tastes in this direction have sometimes outstripped her readers', and her most recondite tales now appear under the pen name Barbara Vine. Rendell's Chief Inspector Wexford mysteries are a somewhat friendlier affair, and in this, the nineteenth of the series, fans will be pleased to find the Wexfords staving off a flood in their garden and the Inspector's clueless elder daughter in trouble again. The plot—a series of puzzles surrounding the disappearance of two teen-agers in the care of a family friend—marches efficiently to its unguessable dénouement while demonstrating Rendell's grasp of the psychological dynamics of seduction and exploitation which lie at the heart of the case.

The Book of Hard Things, *by Sue Halpern (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $22).* Cuzzy Gage, eighteen years old and living in upstate New York, doesn't have much in the way of prospects: no job, no home, and no family, except for a father in a mental hospital and an estranged girlfriend and their baby son. He's been camping out in the woods, and winter is coming. When a schoolteacher from New York City takes Cuzzy in—partly to stem his own feelings of drift—an intense, unlikely friendship, full of wariness and misunderstandings, develops. This first novel by the essayist Sue Halpern recalls the author's nature writing in its evocation of the sparse rock and pine of the Adirondack countryside, dotted with trailers and streams and baronial retreats. At times, the social tensions between characters feel too obviously choreographed: the action takes place in a town called Poverty. But Halpern does her characters—both the deprived locals and the overcivilized, rootless newcomers—the service of neither condescending to nor ennobling them.



Stories from the City of God, *by Pier Paolo Pasolini, edited by Walter Siti, translated from the Italian by Marina Harss (Handsel; $24).* Pasolini should be better known in English as a writer—as a poet, novelist, and journalist—and this volume provides a good introduction. It's a collection of short pieces written between 1950, when Pasolini arrived in Rome, "the city of God," from his native Friuli, and 1966, and published mainly in newspapers and periodicals. The first half of the book is a stroll through lowlife Rome—the *ragazzi* (street boys) selling chestnuts on the Ponte Garibaldi, or diving off a float in the Tiber, or stealing fish from the city market to sell in Testaccio. The pieces in the second half range from commentary on Roman slang and on housing for the poor to an account of a day spent with Alberto Moravia. Throughout, the main character is the city, where "beauty and ugliness go hand in hand": "The latter renders the former touching and human. The former allows us to forget the latter."

American Jesus, *by Stephen Prothero (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $25).* To the Puritans who settled the Colonies, Jesus was a marginal figure, and the Old Testament more important than the New. In the four centuries since, however, he has slipped the bonds of Christianity altogether to become icon and brand, as American as Mickey Mouse or the Coca-Cola bottle. This wide-ranging history traces a dual evolution: of American religion (not only Christianity but Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism) in terms of its relationship to Jesus; and of his multiform manifestations in response to changing cultural currents, from Thomas Jefferson's publication of a book of Jesus' life and sayings that excised all mention of the miracles and the resurrection to the Hindu Vedantists' veneration of "Christ the Yogi."

man began his career at the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency; he volunteered to work for Nixon after watching the Checkers speech on television, in 1952.

Nixon's reliance on advertising expertise was eventually the subject of an exposé, Joe McGinniss's "The Selling of the President 1968"—a book presented, as the title suggests, as the underside of the stories that White was telling in his best-selling campaign histories. McGinniss quoted Boorstin extensively, and his contempt for Nixon's use of advertising was so intense that he just assumed that readers would share it. He seemed to feel that the fact that Nixon made a number of takes when recording television commercials was proof of a deep inauthenticity. Today, as Greenberg says, "The Selling of the President" seems naïve. Of course politicians produce television commercials, and of course they fix them up before they put them on the air. Television had something to do with turning Presidential campaigns into tactical image wars, but so did print-dinosaur journalists like White, who covered campaigns as though they were boxing matches, a sequence of punches and counterpunches, points and knockdowns, with a running score kept by opinion polls.

Nixon and Nixon's handlers were not dinosaurs and they were not Boorstinites. The man who wrote to Nixon in 1967 to explain how he could win the Presidency with a campaign waged mostly on television was William Gavin, who was an English teacher—which means, in 1967, that he had read Marshall McLuhan, and he cited him in his campaign memos. McLuhan had himself been an English professor; he had written important articles on topics like landscape in the poetry of Alfred Tennyson. In 1964, he published his big book, "Understanding Media," in which he took to task technological troglodytes like White and Boorstin. White had got it completely backward about the debates, McLuhan said. Nixon on television wasn't "fuzzed": he was, on the contrary, too well defined. Television dislikes definition; it favors blurriness. This is why movie stars don't travel well when they go over to television, and it is why Kennedy "won" the debates. Television is, in McLuhanite terms, a "cool" medium. Because the television image is relatively minimal, TV viewers become, paradoxically, more engaged. They are continually filling in information; so, as McLuhan explained, "anybody whose *appearance* strongly declares his role and status in life is wrong for TV." Nixon "lost," in other words, because he looked like a candidate for President. "When the person presented *looks* classifiable, as Nixon did, the TV viewer has nothing to fill in. He feels uncomfortable with his TV image. He says uneasily, 'There's something about that guy that isn't right.' " Kennedy's asset, therefore, was not his "crispness," as White imagined, but his blurriness. He "did not look like a rich man or like a politician. He could have been anything from a grocer or a professor to a football coach. He was not too precise or too ready of speech in such a way as to spoil his pleasantly tweedy blur of countenance and outline."

For Nixon and his handlers, the lesson was plain: he needed to project an image that voters could "fill in" as it suited them, and this, rather than the banal fact that Nixon campaigned using the methods of commercial advertising, is what McGinniss's book documents. By 1968, Nixon had mastered the trick of presenting himself as, if not all things to all people, enough things to enough people to win two Presidential elections. Greenberg notes that the phrase "the New Nixon" first appeared in 1953: almost from the start, Nixon was a politician who seemed perpetually to be reinventing himself. But the Nixon of the 1968 campaign, the Nixon who had on his team public-relations-savvy people like Roger Ailes and Leonard Garment, and who listened to them, is the Nixon who most deserves the epithet. This Nixon is the reason that people persist in thinking of Nixon as "complicated," and this Nixon made it possible for Greenberg to write a book on the many Nixons.

The test of Boorstin's prediction—that the image culture, and television in particular, would ruin democratic politics—is the men who have been elected to the Presidency since 1960. The question isn't whether any of them were elected because of television. White was probably right that television provided the edge for Kennedy in 1960, though in part that was because it gave him huge exposure—as many as a hundred and twenty million people watched one or more of the debates—in a race against a two-term Vice-President who was far more familiar to the electorate. The question is whether any President since 1960 would have been unelectable without television. It would be hard to make the case that one was. McLuhan's point that television prefers a soft focus may be true, but politicians had discovered the advantages of making themselves into screens on which voters could project their own hopes and fears long before television was part of the process. Appearing on television is something national leaders are compelled, these days, to do. A candidate who fell to pieces in front of a television camera would not be elected, and would not deserve to be.

McLuhan understood that television was not simply radio with pictures, or cinema in a box, but a medium with its own effects. Still, he exaggerated the cognitive side of things, and in this he was not so different from White and Boorstin and McGinniss. He, too, bought into the notion that new media had transformed public life. He just thought that it was all for the better—that it would bring about the end of war and the birth of the "global village."

But what makes the epistemological status of an image different from the epistemological status of a speech or an editorial? Print does not have a special relationship to reality or authenticity, and the electronic media, which McLuhan appointed himself the true prophet of, did not make people more responsible, empathetic, and engaged, either. Greenberg is surely right that images are not somehow distinct from "reality"—especially in political life, where projecting the appropriate image at the appropriate moment is part of leadership, whatever the politician says or does off camera.

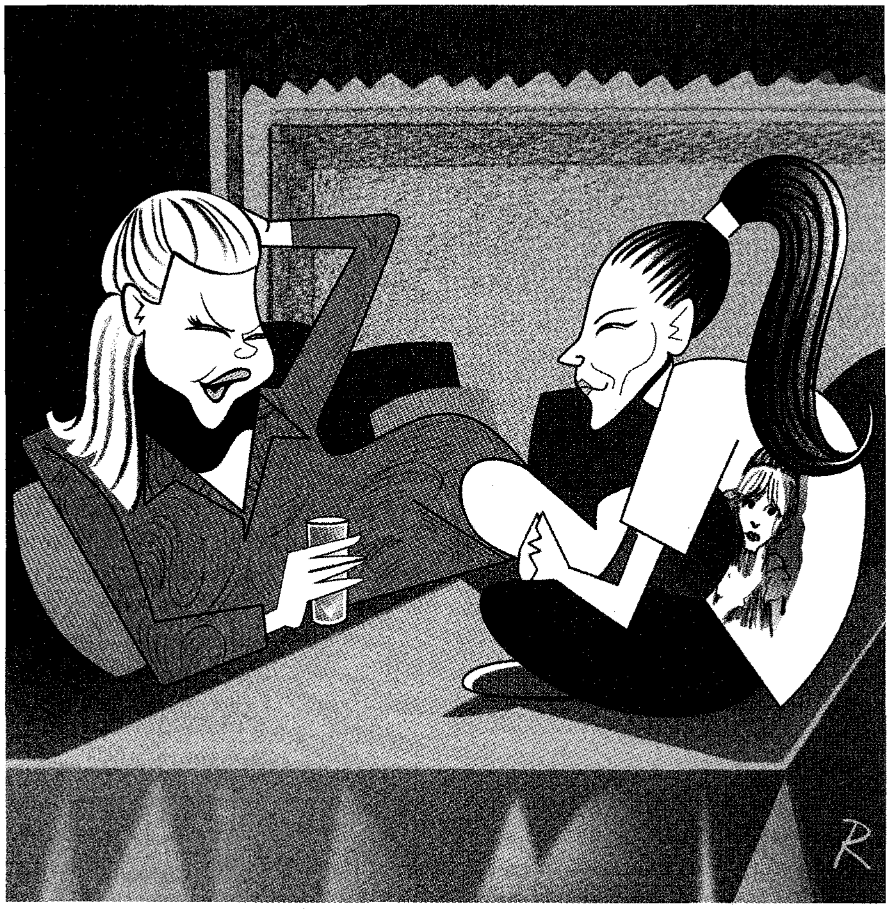
This was especially the case during the Cold War; by 1960, the notion that the struggle against Communism must be waged primarily with images, the alternative being unthinkable, was well established, and is responsible for the special attention paid to the way Kennedy and Nixon "came across" as icons or as performers. But Nixon's career did not end in failure because he manipulated his image, or because there was a discrepancy between the way he appeared in public and the "real Nixon" whose voice we hear on the White House tapes. Nixon's problem didn't have anything to do with his image in an electronic media culture. It had to do with the Constitution, a document that was written with a pen. ♦

THE THEATRE

ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT

Wallace Shawn's "Aunt Dan and Lemon."

BY HILTON ALS



Kristen Johnston and Lili Taylor are the perfect interpreters of Shawn's ideas.

ROBERT RISKO

Lemon (Lili Taylor) wears a "Les Misérables" T-shirt that's a little too big for her slight frame. She swims in her dark cotton trousers, too, which seem baggy from frequent washing. She keeps everything neat, though, even her sentences. From an easy chair, stage right, Lemon greets her guests in the politest of tones. "Hello, dear audience," she says, welcoming us into the Clurman Theatre, where Wallace Shawn's haunting and transcendent 1985 play, "Aunt Dan and Lemon," is now in revival by the New Group. "Dear good people who have taken yourselves out for a special treat, a night at the theatre," she goes on. "Hello, little children. How sweet you are, how innocent. If everyone were just like you, perhaps the world would be nice again." But it's Lemon who is the child, a little girl welcoming us into her doll house. Or, rather, she's a woman locked in the moments when her childhood innocence was forever corrupted—moments that she returns to and dissects again and again.

Lemon lets us in on a few other things as well. She has an undisclosed illness. She doesn't work. Mostly, she just sits in her dark London flat, drinking fruit and vegetable juices. Lemon can afford to do nothing because her father left her a small inheritance—enough to cover her juice, a roll or two (entire meals nauseate her), and a collection of books about the Nazis. Lemon is interested in the Nazis because she has an interest in power, and in how it manifests itself: through a lack of compassion or identification with others. "There's something I find refreshing about the Nazis," she says. "Because they sort of had the nerve to say, 'Well, what *is* this compassion? Because I don't know really what it is.' "

Lemon is a solipsist. Both created and nearly undone by her own thoughts, she holds herself together by being dispassionate. She keeps the world at bay, and it, not Lemon, should be sorry for this. Lemon doesn't read newspapers, which she regards as a waste of time. It's not that she considers herself particularly brilliant; in fact, she finds brilliant people taxing. She's nothing more than a talking head, throwing poison darts of inquiry at the audience as her body fades. For Lemon, sex and intimacy are a distant dream—if they ever existed at all. She cultivates instead the garden of her memory, its rust-colored earth and the three twisted flowers that bloom within it: Mom and Dad and the family friend she calls Aunt Dan (short for Danielle). "You know, people talk about life as if the only things that matter are your own experiences," Lemon says, addressing the audience directly, as she does throughout much of the play. "But you see, to me that's not true. It's not true at all. To me what matters really is the people you knew, the things you learned from them, the things that influenced you deeply and made you what you are."

The things that have made Lemon what she is play themselves out before us in flashback, as she watches from her easy chair, or sits in her bed, center stage. (She jumps in and out of the action at will.) We see Lemon as an eleven-year-old, questioning her mother's authority, and retreating more and more into a little guesthouse in her parents' garden. It's the first of several little spaces—her interior worlds—away from the social milieu inhabited by her parents, an American businessman consumed by work and an egocentric mother who projects her self-loathing and exacting standards onto her daughter. Lemon's parents are not so much involved with each other as they are alone together. Lemon is alone with herself, and her solitude is punctured only by visits from the loquacious Aunt Dan (Kristen Johnston), an American professor living in London, who gives Lemon her nickname—which she prefers to her given name, Leonora.

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charged, and sometimes grotesque monologues, Aunt Dan provides Lemon with an education in hedonism. In love with power, which for her is a distinctly male acquisition, Dan longs to be powerful by association—a handmaiden to the kind of destruction, no matter how bloody or absurd, which cuts through all the passive, ineffectual *thinking* that changes nothing. Arguing for the human face of Fascism, Aunt Dan reveals her desire for Henry Kissinger—whom she views as one of the most eligible bachelors in the world. She simply can't understand why Kissinger is considered a war criminal by forward-looking people, such as Lemon's mother (Melissa Errico). Turning affairs of state into a children's story, Dan explains Kissinger's strategies to the young Lemon:

> He's trying to get the North Vietnamese in a corner, Lemon, so they'll have to give up. And so he goes to the President of North Vietnam, and he says, "Do you know what? You don't have any friends anymore. . . . I killed them all." And the President of North Vietnam is pretty surprised at first, but then he says to Kissinger, "But what about the President of China? Isn't he my friend?" And Kissinger says, "Oh no, not anymore. He's *my* friend now, I just had dinner with him over at my house, and he told me himself he *hates* you." So what can the President of North Vietnam do? He *has* to give up.

Shawn is one of the few American playwrights to eschew psychological background as a means of explaining character; he prefers the audience to draw its own conclusions from the characters' behavior. So, instead of giving us the details of Dan's past, he asks us to help invent her—to imagine an intellectual history that could have made her what she is. (Although Shawn's political context is the seventies, the scenes that show Aunt Dan as a young woman appear—thanks to the costumes, by Eric Becker—to be set in the swinging sixties. This sartorial confusion is perhaps a result of the failure of the director, Scott Elliott, to develop a consistent point of view. He fumbles whenever he tries to stage the secondary characters' movements and Lemon's interventions in the narrative. It's as if the play moved too fast for Elliott, and Johnston and Taylor did, too.)

As Aunt Dan, Johnston is touching, funny, and brittle: a female drag queen who wraps her ideology around her tall frame like a bright and mangy feather boa. Several years ago, I saw Johnston play Sabina in Thornton Wilder's "The Skin of Our Teeth." It was a great part for her—big and showy. Her Dan is Sabina's younger sister, a Tallulah Bankhead for the Y generation. Johnston is so in love with performing that the very act of speaking turns her on. She's the perfect foil for Taylor's Lemon, and her ideal love object: just as Aunt Dan yearns to be overwhelmed by force—a male force—Lemon secretly desires to be overwhelmed by Aunt Dan.

While Johnston makes her voice and emotions carry, Taylor uses hers like a metronome, a steel rod that clicks lightly away, while her mind plays con brio. Taylor has done the best work of her career in recent years. As a self-pitying mother who goes missing on the TV series "Six Feet Under," as the skeptical American in "Casa de los Babys," and now here, she has contributed something valuable to contemporary American acting: unsympathetic characters whose humanity cannot be denied. Too many performers play adorable, no matter what the text. Taylor listens to her characters first. She can swirl in their smarminess or bask in their bathos. And she gets Shawn's script, too—its near-fetishization of the strange activity of exchanging ideas.

In "Aunt Dan and Lemon," Shawn seems always to be asking questions: Is this the best we can do—fantasize about political figures as secular saints? And what does being a parent, a friend, a woman, a person mean? But his humor—the commonplace wit of the polymath—defuses any accusation of polemicism. Rather, he is a philosopher in the Socratic mode: he puts ideas on the stage. In Taylor, he has found the ideal interpreter of those ideas, an actress who can convey the ways in which Lemon intellectualizes her wounds in order to control the emotions they engender. In "Aunt Dan and Lemon," Shawn examines the cruelty inherent in that disconnectedness. "Yes, there's something inside us that likes to kill," Lemon says with sweet reasonableness at the end of the play. "Some *part* of us. Why wouldn't that be so? Our nature is derived from the nature of animals, and . . . if killing were totally repugnant to animals, they couldn't survive." It's blood, she implies, that feeds the life of the mind. ♦

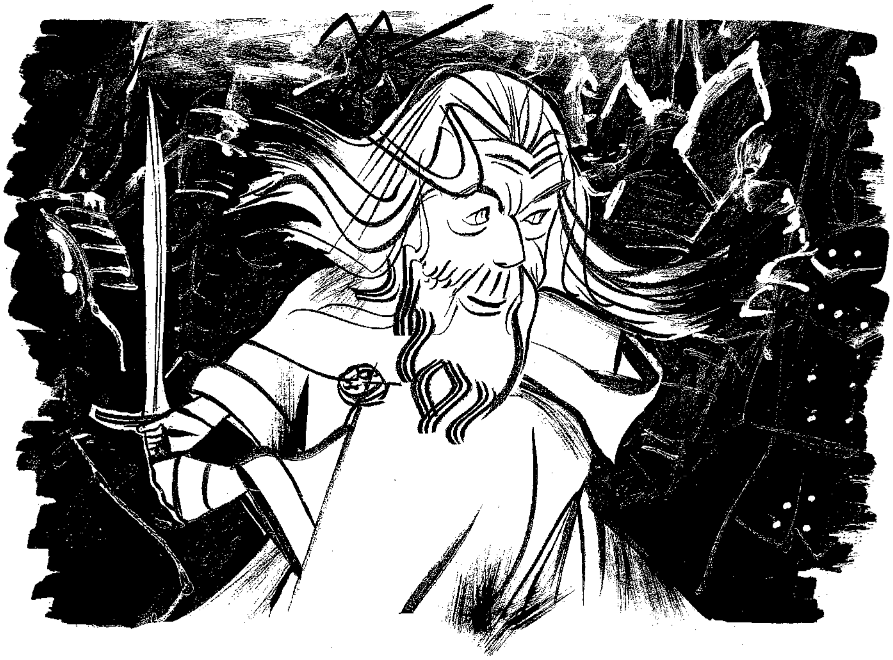
THE CURRENT CINEMA

FULL CIRCLE

"The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King."

BY ANTHONY LANE

This is what happened when a fellow-critic and I emerged, on December 11th, from a screening of "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King." It had started well before noon, and the skies were practically dark by the time we staggered out. The movie, the last of a trilogy, runs almost three and a half hours, but, if you factor in the emotional buildup, the crammed ticket line, and the decompression period that will be required afterward, you are talking about an entire day ripped from your mortal life.



As Gandalf, Ian McKellen calls on the declamatory style that he refined onstage.

TOM BACHTELL

So there we were, fresh from the battles of Middle-earth, nursing our punished eardrums, when what did we see? A throng of youth, six or seven deep, caged behind barricades, lining the route from the movie theatre. Like pleading spirits in Dante's Purgatory, they stretched out their arms, beseeching us to sign their programs, their curling copies of Tolkien, and, for all I know, their naked limbs. Bear in mind that this was a press screening, and that these boys and girls were forcing themselves upon movie reviewers—by and large, a profession that spends remarkably little time fending off the attention of groupies. Indeed, there is a body of opinion which holds that we should carry little bells, like lepers in the Middle Ages, to warn respectable citizens of our foul approach. The question is: If this was the press screening, what the hell were the premières like? Why did a hundred thousand people cram the route to the theatre when the film first showed in Wellington, New Zealand, on December 1st? Did the kids tear the clothes off Orlando Bloom, the svelte incarnation of Legolas? Is Sir Ian McKellen prepared to be mobbed, on a regular basis, on red carpets all over the world? In short, what is going on?

As Alfred Hitchcock said to one of his leading ladies, "It's only a movie, Ingrid." The nub of "The Return of the King" is a ring of simple design but unrivalled potency, which must be destroyed before it falls into the grasp of Sauron—a character so purely villainous that, under union rules, he is played not by an actor but by a single eye, blazing from the top of a tower. Frodo Baggins (Elijah Wood) and his sidekick Sam (Sean Astin) are two-thirds through their appointed mission, which is to bear the ring to Mordor and cast it into the maw of Mount Doom, at which point the power will cut out completely in Michigan, Cleveland, and other parts of Middle-earth up to and including New Jersey. At the same time, most of those who, in the first installment, joined together to form the Fellowship of the Ring are still toiling in the service of truth, beauty, and horsemanship. We have Arwen (Liv Tyler), an elven princess, of whom it is written in ancient runes that she must be viewed in naught but soft focus and, if possible, on the brink of tears; Legolas the elf, the most unflustered blond to grace our screens since Veronica Lake; Pippin (Billy Boyd) and Merry (Dominic Monaghan), a pair of slightly annoying hobbits who spent much of the previous film, "The Two Towers," being hugged by the boughs of enormous trees, and who are now offered the chance to redeem themselves at ground level, in battle; and Gimli (John Rhys-Davies), a dwarf of twofold purpose. First, he is an axeman, hewing cold cuts from the midriffs of selected villains, and, second, he is a funnyman, slicing through the loftiness of the enterprise with his peremptory vows of action. "Certainty of death—small chance of success—what are we waiting for?" he asks cheerfully on the eve of conflict, sounding like a toughened version of Dickens's Mr. Jingle.

Then, we have men, a solemn race. Tolkien may be charting the victory, familiar from a hundred fairy tales, of good over evil, but such mastery comes at a melancholy price, for it marks the end of one age—that of wizardry, elvishness, and free trips on the backs of giant eagles—and the dawning of another. From now on, men will rule Middle-earth, and one senses, both in Tolkien and in Peter Jackson's adaptation, a wistful belief that life, though fair and wisely governed, will be much less of a blast. Just inspect the face of Aragorn (Viggo Mortensen) at the close of this picture. Over many hours, his startling career path has gone from a quiet drink at the Prancing Pony to the sacred throne of Gondor (he is the King of the title), but does the guy look happy about it? To me he looks taut and burdened, not least by the terrible awareness that, this being Tolkien, he will have to sing a ballad at his own coronation.

How much freer he seemed in the slash and lunge of war, leaping over the gunwales of a longboat. The core of "The Return of the King" is consumed by the Battle of the Pelennor Fields, in which Aragorn hooks up with King Théoden (Bernard Hill), the honorable leader of the kingdom of Rohan, to overthrow the Nazgûl—creatures so mightily equipped in malice that each gets to drive his own personal airborne dragon. Under the Nazgûl's thumb are thousands of orcs—ugly thugs commanded by what appears to be a giant potato—plus, I am thrilled to report, a herd of mûmakil. These are what the hobbits call oliphaunts, what Piglet used to call heffalumps, and what I would call a good excuse to take the next available flight out of Middle-earth. A mûmak, to judge by the spikes on the ends of its tusks, is made by crossing a double helping of mammoth with a porcupine, and each one bears a company of archers on its back. Legolas, a fit fellow, takes one look and sees his chance for a workout. He shinnies up a back leg, hangs on to the hide, fells half the riders with a ping of his bow, chops a rope holding the rest, shoots an arrow into the presumably tiny brain of the animal, feels it slump to its knees, and then trips lightly down its trunk like Fred Astaire descending a staircase. Unconfirmed reports suggest that this is the coolest single activity ever recorded on film, and the audience around me went into spasms of worshipful hilarity. Somebody to my left actually stood to applaud, as George II is said to have done when he first heard the Hallelujah Chorus.

How does "The Return of the King" differ from its two predecessors? Well, for one thing Gandalf has been spending time at the salon. His hair has grown straighter and whiter with every film, and at times, especially when he is mixing with similarly coiffed elves, we seem to have stumbled into a Rick Wakeman revival tour. Gandalf not only plots the triumph of justice but takes a valorous role in its fulfillment, at one point wielding his staff with an éclat that might stop even Uma Thurman in her tracks. It's a wonderful part for Ian McKellen, constantly calling upon the high, hard, declamatory style that he refined onstage, and that reappears here in the warnings that Gandalf delivers to his anxious companions. "It's so quiet," Pippin says, to which the Wise One replies, "It's the deep breath before the plunge."

McKellen was the best Uncle Vanya I have seen, and the best thing in his performance, at London's National Theatre, came after the final line, when Vanya fussed around his study, shuffling papers and tidying the desk. He was trying, however trivially, to assert some order, though both he and we knew that his soul was in disarray. There is little time, even over nine hours of "The Lord of the Rings," for that kind of casual detail, and one treasures it when it comes—when Gandalf turns to the garrulous Pippin on the threshold of a court, urges him not to mention certain matters when they enter, then pauses and adds, "In fact, it's better if you don't speak at all." McKellen times the advice so beautifully that the audience laughs in relief, as if we helplessly hankered for comedy, however mild, when the fate of civilizations is up for grabs.

All of which confirms that the director of the trilogy, Peter Jackson, has an epic on his hands. The word "epic" is tossed around, in movie circles, with regrettable abandon, being used as a critic's noun to describe any picture more than two and a half hours long and as a publicist's adjective to mean "overpaid," as in, "Didn't you think Ben Affleck was kind of epic in 'Daredevil'?" But "The Lord of the Rings" fits the bill, because of the unflagging momentum of Frodo's quest, because of its rather magnificent indifference to the forces of irony (which would be constantly on the prowl were we watching a mock epic), and because Jackson has revived a grand and unembarrassable quality that sustained moviemakers from Griffith to the heyday of David Lean: he has nerve.

How else can one explain the bracing vastness of the project? Jackson shares with Lean a reckless will to cut from engrossed closeup to a panoramic, Nazgûl's-eye view of a parched plain or a roiling battlefield—to look his characters in the face, until we can see every wrinkle of their troubles, and then to draw back so far that those troubles melt into near-nothing, into specks on the surface of invented history. When the riders of Rohan—allies of Gandalf and Aragorn—are summoned to the fray, it is not by messenger, still less by magic, but by a line of lighted beacons, as the Romans used to be, and Jackson's roistering mix of speed and splendor allows us to vault from one mountaintop to the next

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ON NEW TERMS

I'd like to begin again. Not touch my
own face, not tremble in the dark before
an intruder who never arrives. Not
apologize. Not scurry, not pace. Not
refuse to keep notes of what meant the most.
Not skirt my father's ghost. Not abandon
piano, or a book before the end.
Not count, count, count and wait, poised—the control,
the agony controlled—for the loss of
the one, having borne, I can't be, won't breathe
without: the foregone conclusion, the pain
not yet met, the preëmptive mourning
without which
                        nothing left of me but smoke.

—*Deborah Garrison*

until we reach the end of the line, where the grim rapture of Aragorn, as he spies the flame, signals that, at long last, the game's afoot.

Of course, there are times when this elastic manner—Jackson's wish to encompass Middle-earth by any and every stretch of the imagination—throws the action out of whack. The final tussle over the ring between Frodo and his indispensable nemesis, Gollum, on the verge of a volcano drags on so long that what it means for Middle-earth, as opposed to what it says of our hero's anguish, is all but lost, and everything that unfurls after that climax feels dramatically blurred, as if Jackson, like Frodo, were so shattered by his undertaking that he finds it hard to concentrate. Tolkien has a tremendous late chapter entitled "The Scouring of the Shire," in which the hobbits return to their land and find it snarled in petty feuds, a hangover of Sauron's influence, which they consider it their business to erase. It always makes me think of post-Vichy France, riven with bitter charges of German collaboration, and not a jot of it remains onscreen. Instead, the movie closes in limp bucolic mood; Sam, the staunchest figure in the saga, goes home to a bosomy hobbitess, as he does in the novel, but Jackson, the man who can marshal warriors by the thousand, finds it hard to catch the rusticity—brisk, unsentimental, cider-sharp—of the original.

Perhaps that is as it should be. As I watched this film, an eager victim of its boundless will to astound, I found my loyal memories of the book beginning to fade. It may be time to halt the endless comparisons between page and screen, and to confess that the two are very different beasts. Moments that lurk deep in the body of the novel are brought into the light. I had never fully clocked the subplot of Éowyn (Miranda Otto), King Théoden's niece, until she turned up in the movie, clad in a man's armor, and dared to confront the chief of the Nazgûl. He hisses that he fears no man, whereupon she whips off her helmet, shakes her tresses, and utters the Shakespearean cry "I am no man," following it up with a solid jab on the Naz. I wish Laurence Olivier were alive to see that. It was he who realized that to film Shakespeare was not enough—one had to dig for what was filmlike in Shakespeare, to shock his words into becoming the natural flesh of a movie. And so it is with Jackson; when I watch Legolas scrambling up that mûmak, my mind turns not to Tolkien (who wrote no such scene, anyway) but to Douglas Fairbanks, scaling the side of a ship, in "The Black Pirate," with monkeyish ease and delight. Peter Jackson has not really made a movie of "The Lord of the Rings"; he has sprung clear of it to forge something new. He has drawn a deep breath, and taken the plunge. ♦

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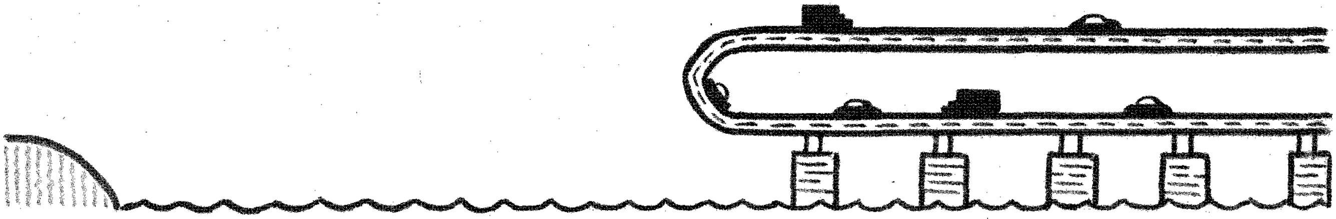

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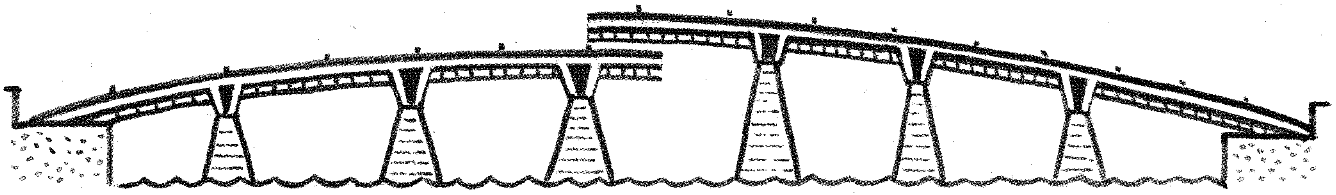

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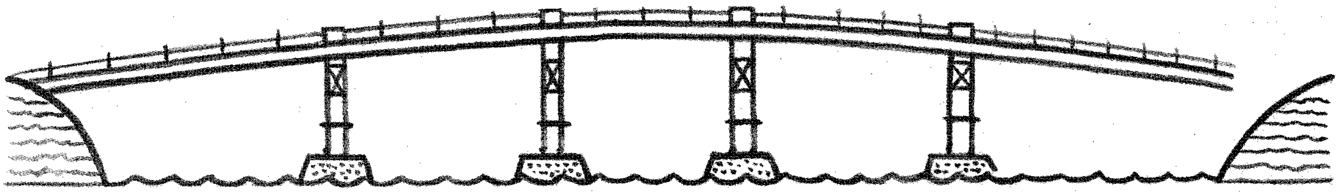

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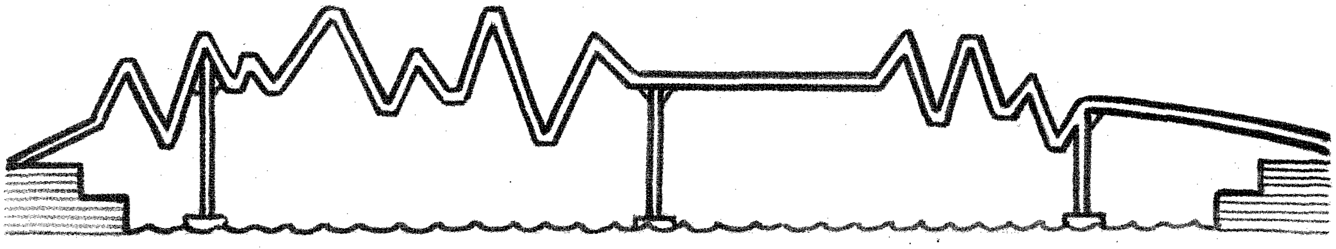

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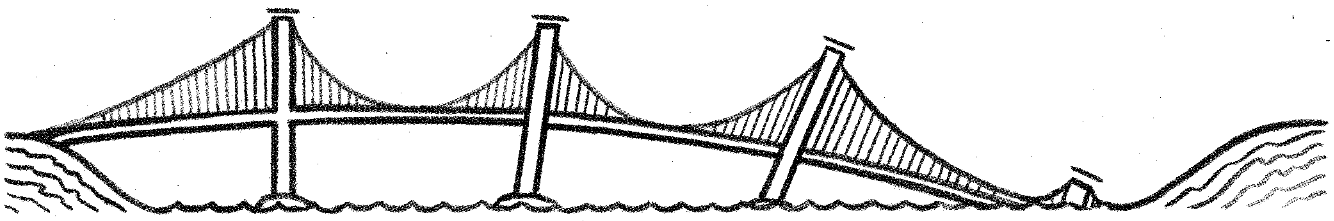

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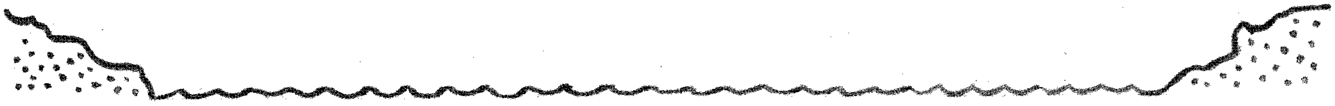

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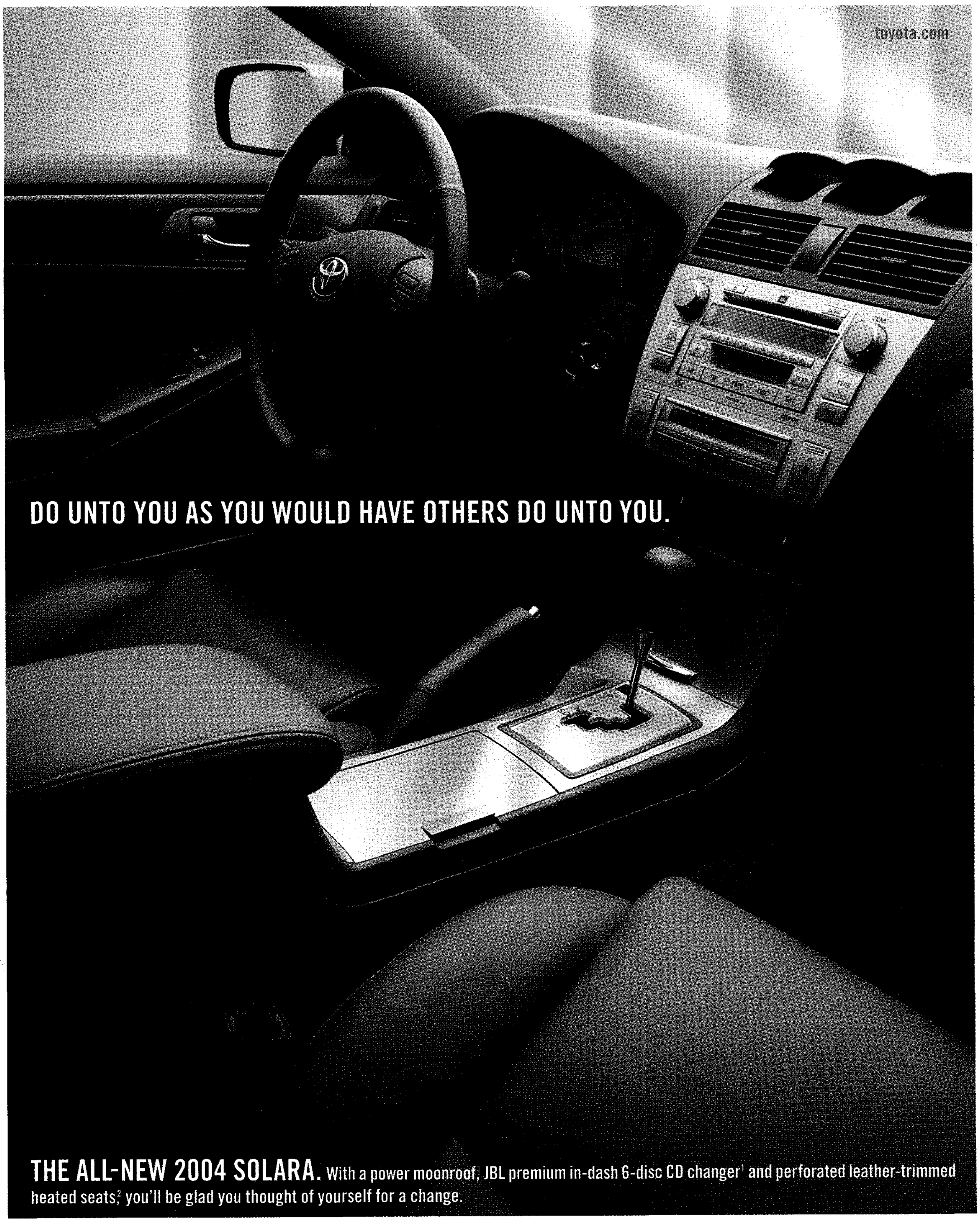

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